

PREPARING LAY LEADERS TO SAY WHAT GOD HAS SAID

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF

GORDON-CONWELL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

KEVIN M. FLANNERY

MAY 2007

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	iv
Abstract	v
I. Identification of the Problem	1
II. Theological Considerations	5
III. Literature Review	32
IV. Thesis-Project	46
V. Results and Recommendations	118
Bibliography	134
Vita	137

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my wife Cheryl who has shared this journey with me, without a doubt you had to pay the higher cost as I was often physically and emotionally absent and mentally preoccupied for significant periods of time. I appreciate your love and understanding that made completing this project possible! Thank you for your constant love and partnership in the ministry that God has given us.

To my daughter McKenzie, thanks for giving up some your “dad time.” I plan on making this up in spades! What an honor it is to be your father and to have you as my daughter.

A special note of appreciation goes out to Earl Weigelt for his friendship and help in editing this project. Just saying “thank you” feels like a woefully inadequate response to your generosity.

To the members of the Congregational Church of Windsor Locks, Connecticut, I express my deep appreciation for your support (i.e., financial, spiritual, relational) for my participation in this program and your belief in its importance in my development as a preacher of the gospel. I cannot imagine a better context in which to preach on a weekly basis. You have helped me to understand some of what must have been going through the Apostle Paul’s heart when he penned: “We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us” (NIV 1 Thessalonians 2:8). You have become much more than friends, you have become family! It is a privilege and an honor to get to share the gospel and our lives with you!

ABSTRACT

The author provides a training model that takes lay members of a local congregation through three seminars that will provide basic theory and practical training in biblical communication. Specifically the goal is to help the participants increase their effectiveness in expository preaching and teaching. The three core areas of the seminars are: (1) Discover the idea – Learn how to *identify* the “Big Idea” of a biblical passage; (2) Develop the idea – Learn how to logically *develop* the biblical idea for presentation to a target audience; (3) Deliver the idea – Learn how to implement a few key steps to *communicate* the logically-developed biblical idea to a target audience.

The process is designed for those who have limited training. The seminar method is a combination of small group class instruction, hands-on exercises to master the key concepts, and student-facilitator interaction.

CHAPTER ONE

IDENTIFICATION OF THE PROBLEM

The call to preach is a great privilege and an awesome responsibility and is not to be taken lightly. Some people are called to serve as full-time pastors at local churches and preach routinely. Although they have many responsibilities as pastors, preaching well is usually high on their list of priorities, and preaching effective sermons that are both biblical and relevant is no small challenge. Committed preachers recognize the challenge to feed the congregation quality sermons week-in and week-out. Some weeks are short due to emergencies that interrupt the “normal” routine of pastoral ministry, but a sermon is still expected and needed on Sunday morning. Fortunately, many vocational pastors have had theological and homiletical training that aids them in feeding God’s sheep through God’s Word. But full-time preachers aren’t the only ones who proclaim God’s Word.

Churches everywhere have laypeople who, though engaged in secular occupations, are energized by the idea of preaching the word of God. These are committed believers whose gifts can be used to advance God’s kingdom, if only they were given the opportunity. And truly, just such an opportunity does exist; they can assist the pastor.

Professional clergy aren’t able to do all the ministry that exists in even a small church. Trying to “do it all” frequently leads to burnout and the heartache that follows. When a pastor takes on more ministry than can be managed and burns out, great

disillusionment can result, both for the minister and for the congregation. What a price to pay for failing to delegate some responsibility!

Another problem that emerges when pastors do “all” the ministry is that this approach robs the congregation of the joy that comes from using their God-given gifts to expand His kingdom. The church is missing out that doesn’t move its laity into ministry, including the ministry of preaching. It is God’s design for leaders in the church to equip the laity for kingdom ministry. Paul wrote, “So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up” (Ephesians 4:11-12).¹ There are numerous areas of church life where the professional clergy can equip the laity for service, so that the body of Christ may be built up. One important area that deserves attention is training lay people to teach expository lessons and preach expository messages.

The aim of this thesis-project is to provide pastors who are committed to expository preaching and teaching with a means to train lay leaders to “say what God has said.” The instructional course that follows covers three seminars that train laypeople in the three key areas of the expository process. The goal is to help students increase their effectiveness in expository preaching and teaching. The three core areas that will be taught in these seminars are: (1) Discover the idea – Learn how to *identify* the “Big Idea” of a biblical passage; (2) Develop the idea – Learn how to logically *develop* the biblical

¹ All Scripture quotations in this paper are from *Today’s New International Version* (TNIV) ©2001, 2005, unless otherwise noted.

idea for presentation to a target audience; (3) Deliver the idea – Learn how to implement a few key steps *to communicate* the logically-developed biblical idea to a target audience.

The seminars proposed for this thesis-project will be helpful in a number of contexts. First, they are designed to train lay people in discovering, developing, and delivering expository messages. Pastors can be more effective by training others to communicate biblical and relevant messages. Second, ministerial staff members who have not received homiletical training will benefit from these seminars. Not everyone has had the privilege of formal training in expository preaching, so, this course will benefit those on the ministerial staff who have yet to be exposed to this philosophy of preaching. Third, these seminars could be given at the district level of many denominations. Many denominations have annual training events to equip the laity. These three seminars could multiply effective lay expository communication for an entire district.

This project could benefit the local congregation in a number of ways. First, it could multiply a pastor's expository impact on the congregation. Second, training lay leaders in this philosophy of preaching equips a church for emergency situations. For example, a trained lay preacher can be a valuable resource when a pastor is not able to preach or when a congregation is in an interim period without a full-time pastor. Third, pastoral search teams could benefit by having members who have completed these seminars by providing solid criteria by which to evaluate candidates. Even a rudimentary understanding of what makes for effective expository preaching can help a search team find a pastor who is dedicated to this approach to preaching. Fourth, this process has the potential of identifying gifted lay-people whom God might be calling into full-time Christian service.

The following chapters will concentrate on the theological considerations that need to be addressed, provide a review of literature that will be helpful to the leaders of these seminars, deliver the actual seminars that focus on discovering, developing, and delivering expository messages; and make recommendations to future leaders.

May God raise up a host of lay people who can effectively say what God has said!

CHAPTER TWO

THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

To the budding young pastor Timothy, the apostle Paul gave God's bold charge to "Preach the Word" (2 Timothy 4:2)! But preaching is only one of the many hats that a pastor wears in daily ministry. There are meetings to attend, congregants to counsel, staff and lay leaders to train, buildings to care for, distraught and struggling people who need comforting, programs to manage, personnel problems to engage and countless other demands that squeeze their way into a preacher's schedule.

The original apostles felt this pinch early in their ministry as the Church was booming numerically (Acts 6:1-6). Growth can be a very encouraging sign, but as anyone who has been involved in ministry for any period of time knows, it can also surface new challenges. A difficulty arose that pitted the Grecian Jews against the Hebraic Jews. The Grecian Jews complained that their widows were being shorted in the distribution of food. The Twelve gathered all the disciples to address this problem, and in doing so they saw that they had to make a choice. They knew that the cost of hands-on involvement for them personally would require that they neglect the ministry of the Word. Consequently, they delegated the responsibility of solving the food distribution issue so that they could prioritize their ministry on prayer and the ministry of the Word.

All kinds of situations have challenged pastors throughout the centuries. Unfortunately, the Church hasn't always prioritized biblical proclamation as the Apostle Paul and the Twelve modeled for us. Stephen Olford, highlights how one United

Methodist Bishop, Carl J. Sanders tried to improve the quality and refocus the priority of preaching:

In the multiple roles of a pastor, his identity as a “preacher” may be lost; the quality of his preaching may decline as he fills other functions and neglects the disciplines required for effectual preaching; and confidence in the superior efficacy of preaching may fade as other ministries appear more redemptive.... History proves, however, that the Church can exist without buildings, without liturgies, without choirs, without Sunday Schools, without professional clergymen, without creeds, without even women’s societies. But it cannot possibly exist without preaching the Word. Preaching has power like nothing else the Church has or does. Moreover, preaching reaches more people than anything else the preacher can do, whether it is teaching, visiting, administering, or counseling.... The time has come to restore preaching to its rightful place, its primary position in the work of the ministry. In preaching there is power! The power of the Spirit is the power of the Word. As the Word is proclaimed, the Spirit is busy working in the mind and heart of the hearer.²

Many today would query this exalted view of preaching. There are a lot of voices questioning whether or not the traditional model of proclamation is really what post-moderns want or even need. Some of the protest might be a result of the poor quality of preaching that has been grouped under the heading “biblical preaching.” As people of the Word, the issue of the need for and benefit of biblical proclamation must be answered scripturally; therefore three theological areas will be explored: (1) The primacy of expository preaching, (2) The authority for expository preaching, and (3) The essence of expository preaching.

² Stephen Olford with David Olford, *Anointed Expository Preaching* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), 5.

THE PRIMACY OF EXPOSITORY PREACHING

The simplest answer to the question, “Why preach?” is: “Because God has spoken”.³ Or to borrow Francis Schaeffer’s title—as he was referring to the reality of a personal God choosing to disclose himself to humanity—*He Is There and He Is Not Silent*.⁴ The God who is there has revealed himself and now he commands us to speak. Christianity posits that God is a personal God; therefore it is in keeping with his personal nature that he would communicate with those whom he created. How has God communicated with his creation? For the purposes of this chapter three methods of God’s communication will be explored: general revelation, special revelation, and the incarnation.

God has revealed himself through creation as the apostle Paul made clear in the opening chapter of his epistle to the Romans:

since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse. (Rom. 1:19-20)

The Holman Bible Dictionary states, “General revelation is universal in the sense that it is God’s self-disclosure of himself in a general way to all people at all times in all places.”⁵ Early in biblical history King David commented on what later theologians would call natural or general revelation. He understood this means of divine

³ R. A. Mohler, *A Theology of Preaching*, in *Handbook on Contemporary Preaching*, ed. by Michael Duduit. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers. 1992), 14.

⁴ Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: A Christian World View, Volume 1 Book Three: He Is There and He Is Not Silent* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books. 1982)

⁵ *Holman Bible Dictionary for Windows 1.0d. Revelation of God*. Copyright 1994 Parsons Technology.

communication as he pointed out how the heavens themselves eloquently articulate God's glory:

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. In the heavens he has pitched a tent for the sun, which is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, like a champion rejoicing to run his course. It rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other; nothing is deprived of its warmth. (Psalm 19:1-6)

Scripture tells us that God speaks to us through what he has created, but although this is true, it is nonetheless limited and incomplete in what it reveals about God. The only way an inferior being can know a superior one is by the greater one's voluntary self-disclosure. Even though God's unlimited intelligence allows him to know everything related to his creation, we as limited beings can only know God by what he chooses to reveal to us about himself. All knowledge of God therefore must come by way of revelation. As Carl F. H. Henry suggests, revelation is "a divinely initiated activity, God's free communication by which he alone turns his personal privacy into a deliberate disclosure of his reality."⁶ God has revealed the truth about himself in nature, but he has gone further and given us even more detailed knowledge of himself through what theologians have referred to as "special revelation."

Psalm 19 transitions from natural revelation in the first six verses to special revelation starting in verse seven. This inspired poem shifts from the sun, moon and stars to the radiance of God's law. The first six verses refer to "God" with a general name, but from verse seven on it should be noted that God is called "LORD" (i.e., the English

⁶ Mohler, *A Theology of Preaching*, 14.

translation of the Hebrew for ‘YHWH’). The personal name that Moses received at the burning bush (Exodus 3:15) is used to transition from general knowledge of ‘God’ to the specific knowledge of a God who has a name (YHWH) and who has made himself known.

The law of the LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure, and all of them are righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb. By them your servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward. (Psalm 19:7-11)

Psalm 19 wonderfully contains the two kinds of divine self-disclosure that have been addressed so far. But it is important to understand that special revelation differs from natural revelation in both what it communicates and to whom it is communicated:

In contrast to God’s general revelation which is available to all people, God’s special revelation is available to specific people at specific times in specific places, it is available now only by consultation of sacred Scripture.⁷

Through natural revelation alone one would never discover how to come into right relationship with God. But special revelation progressively explains who we are, what our problem is, and how God has solved humanity’s quandary in and through the person of Jesus Christ. Scripture has a very high view of itself. The Apostle Paul tells us, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). This bold statement argues that the ultimate inspiration for Scripture is God himself. How important in a day and age that believes that the Bible is

⁷ *Holman Bible Dictionary for Windows*, Version 1.0d, “Revelation of God” [diskette] (Hiawatha: Parsons Technology, 1994).

merely earthly sentiments declaring what humans think about God! Paul's statement that God is the prime author and that Scripture has the salutary effect of showing what is wrong in humanity, it then goes on to show how to correct what is wrong, and finishes by teaching people to do what is right.

The Apostle Peter sheds additional light on the nature of inspiration,

Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Pet. 1:20-21)

Scripture tells us that God initiates His revelation. Just like Paul, Peter uses absolute language in making his case. He says, "... prophecy *never* had its origin in the human will." Thus the divine nature of revelation is accented. This does not mean that God refused to use the human personalities of the prophets—Peter states that the Holy Spirit moved the prophets as they brought forth the Word of God. Scripture teaches a dual authorship of our sacred texts. This could be referred to as the instrumental and the ultimate causes of authorship. The prophets were the instrumental cause; they were the instruments (with all their human traits) that God used to communicate his words to humanity. Their experience, training, and personalities came through as they brought God's word to the world but although God used humans, in the ultimate sense he is the author. He is the one who moved the prophets to communicate what he wanted communicated. So, God didn't override the human personalities of the prophets, but worked through these men to insure that His infallible word was the end product. This is what 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:20-21 tell us about the nature of inspiration.

Inspiration is connected to authority. What one believes by the term “inspiration” is determined by where one believes God’s authoritative truth is found today. J. I. Packer claims there are three major schools of thought on the inspiration.⁸

First, Roman Catholics and Orthodox churches believe Scripture is inspired, but they believe that it must be understood through interpretations that are embodied in their own tradition. Authoritative truth resides in the Church’s traditional interpretation of Scripture.

Second, those with a liberal or modernist bent “...find God’s truth in the thoughts, impressions, judgments, theories and speculations that Scripture triggers in their own minds.”⁹ Thus the subjective individual becomes the sole arbitrator of authoritative truth.

Third, Historic Protestantism believes that God’s truth is found in the canonical teachings of Scripture. Packer states,

It [Historic Protestantism] receives these Scriptures as inspired (i.e., God-breathed, 2 Tim. 3:16), inerrant (i.e., totally true in all they affirm), sufficient (i.e., telling us all that God wills to tell us and all that we need to know for salvation and eternal life), and clear (i.e., straightforward and self-interpreting on all matters of importance).¹⁰

This third position is the only one of the three that places the full-authority of God in Scripture itself.

The Bible is special revelation. The Word of God specifically tells us who God is, what he’s like, who we are, and what he requires of us. And yet, the written word, glorious as it is, would be incomplete without the Incarnation. Here God communicated

⁸ J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1993), 16-18.

⁹ Ibid., 17.

¹⁰ Ibid.

by sending his own Son, Jesus Christ, to earth to give the fullest revelation of who he is and what he's like. If one wants to know what God is like, then one needs to consider the person of Jesus Christ.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word *was* God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only [Son], who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:1-3, 14)

In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, *but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son*, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. *The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being*, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs. (Hebrews 1:1-4)

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ... For God was pleased to have *all his fullness dwell in him*. (Colossians 1:15, 19)

God is there and He is not silent! He has spoken by revealing Himself through creation, Scripture, and ultimately through His Son and our Savior Jesus Christ. Mohler succinctly summarizes the first reason we preach: “God’s revelation is the radical claim upon which we dare to speak of God—*He has spoken!*”¹¹

Furthermore, in His special revelation God has commanded that His message of salvation be proclaimed through human messengers. Scripture gives us numerous examples of God’s divine calling. One example of the call to preach can be heard resonating in one of his prophets.

¹¹ Mohler, *A Theology of Preaching*, 14. [emphasis mine]

But if I say, “I will not mention his word or speak anymore in his name,” his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot. (Jeremiah 20:9)

Jeremiah could not refuse to speak God’s message!

The reality that God had spoken made not proclaiming His message unthinkable to another of the Prophets: “The lion has roared—who will not fear? The Sovereign LORD has spoken—who can but prophesy” (Amos 3:8)? The prophets of old knew that they were to speak because *God* had spoken.

God the Father composed the greatest exclamation point in all of divine communication in the incarnation that led to the crucifixion and resurrection. Thomas Goodwin captured this truth well when he said, “God had only one Son and he made him a preacher.”¹² The gospel of Mark says: “Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God” (Mark 1:14). Jesus came into the world as God’s perfect mouthpiece—proclaiming God’s Word to fallen humanity. In the past God had used prophets to tell forth His Word, but Jesus would go on to commission the apostles and subsequent generations of followers to be God’s heralds in His name: “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21).

In the language of the Apostle Paul, God has given us the high privilege and frightening¹³ responsibility of speaking for God Himself, as we communicate the gospel:

¹² Michael J. Quicke, *360 Degree Preaching: Hearing, Speaking, and Living the Word* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 19.

¹³ Mohler, *A Theology of Preaching*, 15: Those who are called to preach bear a heavy duty. As Martin Luther confessed “If I could come down with a good conscience, I would rather be stretched out on a wheel and carry stones than preach one sermon.” Speaking on the basis of what God has spoken is both arduous and glorious. See also, Quicke, *360 Degree Preaching*, 22: Martin Luther wrote, “Preaching is not the work of men... For to this day I, am old and experienced preacher, am still afraid of preaching.”

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. *We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.* (2 Corinthians 5:18-20)

Ambassadors don't speak their own opinions but in representing the one that sent them, they speak another's message. And as Runia says, "If today's preacher brings the same message of reconciliation as Paul and the other apostles, God also speaks through him. Then his word too is not just a human word, but the Word of God himself."¹⁴ This would then seem to correspond with the astonishing and humbling challenge the Apostle Peter gives modern-day preachers: "If you speak, you should do so as one who speaks the very words of God" (1 Peter 4:11a). How can this be? Greidanus states: "For the Spirit who spoke through the prophets is still speaking today through preaching which passes on the message of God's prophets and apostles."¹⁵

A modern example of someone who understood the nature of Ambassadorship is George Shultz:

George Shultz, when Secretary of State during the Reagan administration, kept a large globe in his office. When newly appointed ambassadors had an interview with him and when ambassadors returning from their posts for their first visit with him were leaving his office, Shultz would test them. He would say, "You have to go over the globe and prove to me that you can identify your country." They would go over, spin the globe, and put their finger on the country to which sent—unerringly.

When Shultz's old friend and former Senate majority leader Mike Mansfield was appointed ambassador to Japan, even he was put to the test. This time, however, Ambassador Mansfield spun

¹⁴ Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 8.

¹⁵ Ibid.

the globe and put his hand on the United States. He said: “That’s my country.”

On June 27, 1993, Shultz related this to Brian Lamb on C-Span’s “Booknotes.” Said the secretary: “I’ve told that story, subsequently, to all the ambassadors going out. ‘Never forget you’re over there in that country, but your country is the United States. You’re there to represent us. Take care of our interests and never forget it, and you’re representing the best country in the world.’”¹⁶

Ambassadors for Christ must remember that although they are residents of earth, they are citizens of heaven. Preachers are not put in their high office to conjecture about God and His desires, but rather as ambassadors they are put here to speak for the King of kings and Lord of lords—God Almighty! Ambassadors are bound by their superior’s message. Mohler correctly comments: “Preaching is not the business of speculating about God’s nature, will, or ways, but is bearing witness to what God has spoken concerning Himself. Preaching does not consist of speculation but of exposition.”¹⁷ God is a personal God who wants humanity to know His heart, so he has communicated through nature, the prophets and apostles, and ultimately through His own son Jesus Christ. God “invented” preaching as His chosen method for impacting the world. Michael Quicke states:

Preaching did not emerge from the Church’s experimentation with communication techniques. The Church does not preach because preaching is thought to be a good idea or an effective technique. The sermon has not earned its place in Christian worship by proving its utility in comparison with other means of communication or aspects of worship. Rather, we preach because we have been commanded to preach.¹⁸

Mohler echoes this divine origin of biblical proclamations and speaks to the uniqueness of preaching:

¹⁶ *Bible Illustrator for Windows*, Version 3.0f, “Ambassador’s Test” [diskette] (Hiawatha: Parsons Technology, 1998).

¹⁷ Mohler, *A Theology of Preaching*, 14.

¹⁸ Quicke, *360 Degree Preaching*, 13.

Preaching is a commission—a charge. As Paul stated boldly, it is the task of the minister of the gospel to “preach the Word... in season and out of season” (2 Tim 4:2 NIV). A theology of preaching begins with the humble acknowledgement that preaching is not a human invention but a gracious creation of God and a central part of His revealed will for the Church. Furthermore, preaching is distinctively Christian in its origin and practice. Other religions may include teaching, or even public speech and calls to prayer. However, the preaching act is *sui generis*, a function of the Church established by Jesus Christ.¹⁹

The wisdom for preaching rests not on the feeble wisdom of humanity but on the bedrock of the divine counsel of God. A preacher dares to speak because God has spoken.

Moreover God specifically commissions His Church through her preachers to continue to speak on His behalf.

These twin truths, that God has spoken and that He has commissioned preachers to speak His Word, argue for the primacy of preaching. Quicke points out that, “No other kind of public speaking is therefore in the same league with prophetic preaching.”²⁰

Preaching holds such a unique place in the Christian faith that P. T. Forsyth once commented; “With its preaching Christianity stands or falls. Preaching is the most distinctive institution within Christianity.”²¹ Preaching could be said to be in the very genetic code of Christianity. According to John Broadus, “Preaching is characteristic of Christianity. No other religion has made the regular and frequent assembling of groups of people, to hear religious instruction and exhortation, an integral part of divine worship.”²²

If the Church fails to preach she denies her own identity and abandons her divinely

¹⁹ Mohler, *A Theology of Preaching*, 13.

²⁰ Quicke, *360 Degree Preaching*, 21.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 29.

²² Mohler, *A Theology of Preaching*, 13.

ordained purpose.²³ It is impossible to imagine the Church being faithful to her mission when she lacks fidelity in the pulpit.

THE AUTHORITY FOR EXPOSITORY PREACHING

The Church is called to preach because God has spoken. God has commissioned her to preach, and therefore preaching holds a position of primacy in the life of the Church of Jesus Christ. But, with what authority can the preacher confidently proclaim the Word? Does this authority come from God's call alone? Does it come from the fact that God has commissioned the person to preach? Does it come from the bold personality, moral integrity, or the intellectual ability of the person who stands in the pulpit? The preacher's authority to say "thus saith the Lord" is anchored to what the Lord has actually said in his Word. If a preacher wants to be authoritative then the message must emerge from the passage that is being preached. A preacher's authority rests on; "the historic conviction that what Scripture says, God says."²⁴

The authority of the preacher does not reside in his or her person, but in the biblical text that is being proclaimed. Authority increases or decreases based on how closely aligned the preacher is with the Word that was originally spoken in Scripture.

In the Old Testament, prophets were raised up to proclaim God's message to His people. The prophet was in a very real sense the mouthpiece for God Himself. A prophet was judged as good or bad based on his faithfulness to proclaiming what God actually said. For instance, Jeremiah knew the word he was to proclaim was not his own: "Then

²³ Ibid., 14.

²⁴ J. I. Packer, *God Speaks to Man: Revelation and the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965), 18.

the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, “I have put my words in your mouth” (Jeremiah 1:9).

The authority of the prophets was intimately linked to making sure that they spoke only what God had said. That is why Furnish comments, “The authority of the prophetic preaching did not reside in the speaker, but in the words of which he was the spokesman.”²⁵ It was a dangerous thing to proclaim “Thus says the Lord” or “Hear the word of the Lord,” if the prophet was really just putting forth his own opinions. Furnish says:

These announcements punctuate every paragraph of the prophetic preaching. The prophets are not thereby trying to ... dignify their own status as ‘inspired men.’ Rather, they are trying to underscore the urgency and importance of their message by showing that it is not really ‘their message’ at all, but God’s.²⁶

In a word, if a message is from God then it is authoritative. The Old Testament prophets unmistakably understood this. The prophets were tethered to the words spoken from God; they were not free to put forth their own ideas and opinions (e.g., Deuteronomy 18:9-22, Jeremiah 15:19; 23:16, 28). The prophet’s were to say only what God had said and thus the way to test a prophet was to check his track record. If what the prophet said did not come true, then his message was not from the God of truth.

The New Testament Apostles were sent forth by Jesus Christ to represent God by proclaiming the message of the gospel to the world. The proclamation was based upon the visitation of God—the Word became flesh. Greidanus shares:

²⁵ Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher*, 2 (Footnote 3).

²⁶ Victor Paul Furnish, *Prophets, Apostles, and Preachers: A Study of the Biblical Concept of Preaching* (Int. 17/1 [1963]), 49.

In the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God laid the foundation for the redemption of all people, but this redemptive event had to be proclaimed in order to become effective. Paul in particular underscores the indispensability of preaching. After quoting the Old Testament promise that “every one who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved,” he asks in Rom 10:14-15: “But how are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him whom they have not heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? And how can men preach unless they are sent?”²⁷

Just as the prophets in the Old Testament represented God and not themselves, so the apostles in the New Testament era also acted as God’s spokespersons. Paul understood this as can be seen in how he viewed the Thessalonians’ reception of God’s Word, which he proclaimed: “And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe” (1 Thessalonians 2:13). The apostles were carrying the message of another, but it wasn’t just any message—it was the Word of God. The Thessalonians’ reaction to the Gospel was in line with the reality that they were responding not to human words, but to God’s life saving message.

Apostolic preaching was rooted in the reality that God’s own Word was proclaimed. The New Testament pictures preaching as a divine act, not just human words about God. Preaching is unleashing the power of the gospel to transform human lives.

Scripture shows that both OT prophets and the NT apostles were used by God to preach His Word, the word they preached was in reality God’s Word; but what about preachers today? Preachers today are dependent on the Scriptures as their source of

²⁷ Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher*, 3.

revelation. The Spirit who originally inspired God's Word is the same Spirit who illuminates it in the hearts and minds of today's audiences. This is why at the Second Helvetic Confession of 1566 they could write with the utmost confidence: "Praedicatio verbi Dei est verbum Dei (the preaching of the word of God is the word of God)."²⁸

John Calvin was aware of this truth too, "The Word goeth out of the mouth of God in such a manner that it likewise goeth out of the mouth of men; for God does not speak openly from heaven but employs men as His instruments."²⁹

The qualification for authority in preaching has to do with how much the preacher has yielded to the actual message of a text. Leander Keck notes, "The preacher who has wrestled with the text can... become a prophetic spokesman on behalf of the text."³⁰ It truly is a question of where one tries to locate the authority of a message. The location of the preacher's authority is in God's Word. Timothy was exhorted by Paul to, "Preach the Word" (2 Timothy 4:2a) not his own opinions or anything else. Robinson addresses today's preachers:

Those in the pulpit face the pressing temptation to deliver some message other than that of the Scriptures—a political system (either right-wing or left-wing), a theory of economics, a new religious philosophy, old religious slogans, or a trend in psychology. Ministers can proclaim anything in a stained-glass voice at 11:30 on Sunday morning following the singing of hymns. Yet when they fail to preach the Scriptures, they abandon their authority. That is why most preaching evokes little more than a wide yawn. God is not in it.³¹

²⁸ Ibid., 9.

²⁹ Ronald S. Wallace, "The Preached Word as the Word of God," in *Readings in Calvin's Theology*, ed. Donald McKim (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 231.

³⁰ Leander Keck, *The Bible in the Pulpit: The Renewal of Biblical Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1978), 67.

³¹ Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2001), 20.

The essence of expository is rooted in divine authority—God’s Word—which means preachers need to bend the ideas they preach to God’s.

If the preacher preaches the message of the text then the authority comes across with the divine power. But if the preacher preaches a message alien to the scriptural passage being proclaimed, then the force of the preacher’s message diminishes in direct proportion to how thoroughly the thrust of the text has been abandoned. Powerful preachers are chained to God’s Word.

Only preachers committed to proclaiming what God says have the Bible’s imprimatur on their preaching. Thus, expository preaching endeavors to discover and convey the precise meaning of the Word. Scripture rules over what expositors preach because they unfold what it says. *The meaning of the passage is the message of the sermon.* The text governs the preacher. Expository preachers do not expect others to honor their opinions. Such ministers adhere to Scripture’s truths and expect their listeners to heed the same.³²

By what authority does a preacher preach? The only appropriate authority for preaching is *divine* authority. This is clearly seen when Paul reminds Timothy to establish scriptural authority (2 Timothy 3:16), then Paul encourages timid Timothy to: “Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction” (2 Timothy 4:2). If preachers stick to the message found in a passage of Scripture, then their message is authoritative. If they refuse to adhere to the main thrust of a text, then their message should be dismissed as perhaps clever or insightful but not authoritative. This understanding of how preaching today can still be authoritative leads naturally to the next question: What is the essence of expository preaching?

³² Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book, 1994), 23.

THE ESSENCE OF EXPOSITORY PREACHING

The essence of expository preaching is intricately linked to the question of authority. The text, not the preacher, is ultimately authoritative. Leave the message of the text and the base of authority has been abandoned, but live in the fortress of the authoritative message and the preacher speaks with the very power of God Himself. Another way of putting the question of the essence of expository preaching is; who is in charge in the pulpit? John Stott captures the essence of expository preaching:

*It is my contention that all true Christian preaching is expository preaching. Of course if by an 'expository' sermon is meant a verse-by-verse explanation of a lengthy passage of Scripture, then indeed it is only one possible way of preaching, but this would be a misuse of the word. Properly speaking, 'exposition' has a much broader meaning. It refers to the content of the sermon (biblical truth) rather than its style (a running commentary). To expound Scripture is to bring out of the text what is there and expose it to view. The expositor pries open what appears to be closed, makes plain what is obscure, unravels what is knotted and unfolds what is tightly packed. The opposite of exposition is 'imposition', which is to impose on the text what is not there. But the 'text' in question could be a verse, or a sentence, or even a single word. It could equally be a paragraph, or a chapter, or a whole book. The size of the text is immaterial, so long as it is biblical. What matters is what we do with it. Whether it is long or short, our responsibility as expositors is to open it up in such a way that it speaks its message clearly, plainly, accurately, relevantly, without addition, subtraction or falsification. In expository preaching the biblical text is neither a conventional introduction to a sermon on a largely different theme, nor a convenient peg on which to hang a ragbag of miscellaneous thoughts, but a master which dictates and controls what is said.*³³

³³ Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 126-127.

The text, not the preacher, is the master of what is said. Stott argues that the Bible stands over the preacher; the preacher takes the position of servant of the text. Again his words are as clear as they are challenging:

Obedience is a precondition of understanding. We need to repent of the haughty way in which we sometimes stand in judgment upon Scripture and must learn to sit humbly under its judgment instead. If we come to Scripture with our minds made up, expecting to hear from it only an echo of our own thoughts and never the thunderclap of God's, then indeed he will not speak to us and we shall only be confirmed in our own prejudices. *We must allow the Word of God to confront us, to disturb our security, to undermine our complacency and to overthrow our patterns of thought and behavior.*³⁴

It is the preacher's job to find out what God is saying in the text and then to say what God has said to his or her contemporary audience.

What God has said is vitally important. When God called Moses to lead the Israelites, he was commissioned to say what God had said to him. A great example of this is found in Exodus 19-20 where Moses delivers God's Word to the nation. God is very specific in his command to Moses as to what his message is to be:

Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, "*This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.*" *These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.*" (Exodus 19:3-6)

Moses is told what message he is to give to the people of Israel. God speaks directly to Moses and he is to deliver that very message to the people of God.

³⁴ John Stott, *Culture and the Bible* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1981), 33.

Expository preaching is saying what God has said, but our situation today is different from what it was in Moses' day. God spoke directly to Moses, but now he speaks primarily through his Word. How do we make the transition from a direct to an indirect means of communication?

The New Testament tells us that what has been recorded in Scripture is still to be valued as God's Word for us today. Paul told Timothy: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16). Therefore, God's voice can still be heard through the recorded message of Scripture. Paul tells believers that all Scripture is inspired and useful. This is why the Bible has been called the "Holy" Bible; it is God's very Word to humanity. What makes it "holy" is that God is ultimately behind the inspiration of its message.

Expository preaching is bringing out God's message to the original audience and applying it faithfully to today's audience. It is the conviction of the expository preacher that God's Word alone carries divine authority and only an authoritative message is genuinely powerful. God's Word, inspired and illuminated by God's Spirit is the fundamental means through which spiritual life can be given.

Expository preaching at its core is committed to the fact that people benefit spiritually when what God has spoken is communicated again in a new setting. Peter reminds his listeners and us today that the message he preached was God's Good News: "And this is the word that was preached to you" (1 Peter 1:25b). Peter shared that God's Word was transforming lives and the method of delivery of the Good News was *preaching*. The Apostle Paul agreed with Peter and put it this way:

And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe. (1 Thessalonians 2:13)

Expository preaching is not so much a style of preaching as it is a commitment to the authority of Scripture that shapes how we handle God's Word in both the preparation and preaching of the text. Haddon Robinson observes:

Expository preaching at its core is more a philosophy than a method. Whether or not we can be called expositors starts with our purpose and with our honest answer to the question: "Do you, as a preacher, endeavor to bend your thought to the Scriptures, or do you use the Scriptures to support your thought?" This is not the same question as, "Is what you are preaching orthodox or evangelical?" Nor is it the same as, "Do you hold a high view of the Bible or believe it to be the infallible Word of God?" As important as these questions may appear in other circumstances, a passing grade in systematic theology does not qualify an individual as an expositor of the Bible. Theology may protect us from evils lurking in atomistic, nearsighted interpretations, but at the same time it may blind us from seeing the text. In approaching a passage, we must be willing to reexamine our doctrinal convictions and to reject the judgments of our most respected teachers. We must make a U-turn in our own previous understandings of the Bible should these conflict with the concepts of the biblical writer.³⁵

Like Stott, Robinson shows that expository preaching has more to do with the attitude one brings when one approaches God's holy Word. The passage dominates the message of the sermon. God's Word is seated on the authoritative throne and the preacher humbly kneels in submission by restating what God originally said.

Many do not agree that expository preaching is the best way to preach, but it is possible that some hold this position because of the false caricatures they have experienced. Robinson laments:

³⁵ Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 22.

Admittedly, expository preaching has suffered severely in the pulpits of those claiming to be its friends. Yet not all expository preaching necessarily qualifies as either *expository* or *preaching*. Regrettably the Bureau of Weights and Measures does not have a standard expository sermon encased in glass against which to compare other messages. Ministers may paste the label *expository* on whatever sermon they please, and no consumer advocate will correct them. Yet, in spite of damage done by admirers, genuine expository preaching has behind it the power of the living God.³⁶

If this is the case, then how can the “genuine” article be identified? One way that expository preaching can be gauged and compared is to use a good working definition that combines all the essential elements of what makes up true expository preaching. If God’s Word truly is authoritative, and if this authority lies at the heart of expository preaching, then an effective definition of “expository preaching” should stress this authority as one of its chief elements. Robinson’s definition encapsulates the essence of expository preaching:

Expository preaching is the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and the experience of the preacher, then through the preacher applies to the hearer.³⁷

The authority of God’s Word rings clearly through this definition. Although Robinson’s definition is not as easily memorized as Phillip Brooks’ “*truth mediated through personality*,” it is more comprehensive—it aims at actually combining *all* the necessary definitional elements in a way that helps us think more clearly about this dynamic concept. Robinson breaks his own definition down by showing its three controlling

³⁶ Ibid., 21.

³⁷ Ibid.

presuppositions: (1) Preachers communicate ideas; (2) The idea of a passage should govern the idea of a sermon; and (3) Biblical preaching must be applied.³⁸

Expository preachers make sure that the ideas they preach emerge from the texts they are speaking from—they stand on the authority of the biblical concept. Chapell like Stott and Robinson, argues persuasively for expository preaching:

The fact that the power for spiritual change resides in God's Word argues the case for expository preaching. Expository preaching attempts to present and apply the truths of a specific passage. ... for the beginning preacher and for a regular congregational diet no preaching type is more important.³⁹

Expository preaching is always teleological in its orientation. The desired end product is always a Christ-altered life. Just identifying the truth of the passage is useless if this truth isn't applied. This is similar to chewing food and then spitting it out, just for the taste. No, food should be chewed and swallowed so that it can be enjoyed both for taste and nourishment. In the same way, Scripture should be understood and applied. It might be fun or entertaining just to ponder great biblical ideas, but God's Word is not given to amuse but to transform our lives. J. I. Packer catches the transformative nature of biblical proclamation in his own definition: Preaching is, "The event of God bringing to an audience, a Bible-based, Christ-related, *life-impacting* message of instruction and direction from Himself through the words of a spokesperson."⁴⁰ Quicke actually structures his whole definition around the life-changing character of preaching:

Because preaching is prophetic, *transformational*, and incarnational, *I am drawn to a definition that focuses on its*

³⁸ Haddon Robinson, *My Theory of Homiletics*, in *The Art & Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today's Communicators*, ed. by Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 58-59.

³⁹ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 22.

⁴⁰ Mohler, *A Theology of Preaching*, 19.

dynamic impact. My conviction is that preaching is nothing less than sharing the *in-breaking* of God's good news to create new people in new community. Christian preaching, at its best, is a biblical speaking/listening/seeing/doing event *that God empowers to form Christ-shaped people and communities.*⁴¹

Therefore, because the Word is authoritative the preachers through the power of the Holy Spirit, must apply it both to their own lives and to the lives of the hearers.

Pivotal to gaining a proper understanding of expository preaching is coming to see that it is a way of thinking rather than a method. It is a commitment to core convictions that guide the preacher in all the different phases of sermon preparation and delivery. Various teachers of homiletics state these core convictions differently at times, but the similarities are easy to see. Stott, Robinson, and Adams' convictions (or core commitments or beliefs) can serve as good examples of how the authority of Holy Scripture is central in their philosophies of preaching.

Stott's convictions grow out of the definition he gives of biblical exposition, "To expound Scripture is to open up the inspired text with such faithfulness and sensitivity that God's voice is heard and his people obey him."⁴² Stott then analyzes his own definition of biblical exposition by breaking it down into three main sections made up of two convictions, two obligations, and two expectations. First the two convictions about the biblical text are that it is inspired and to some degree a closed text. Second, the two obligations in expounding the text are faithfulness to the text and sensitivity to the modern world. Third, the two expectations in consequence are we can expect God's own

⁴¹ Quicke, *360 Degree Preaching*, 27.

⁴² John Stott, *A Definition of Biblical Preaching*, in *The Art & Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today's Communicators*, ed. by Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan. 2005), 24.

voice to be heard and God's people will obey him.⁴³ Stott's convictions, obligations and expectations are strikingly similar to what Robinson summarizes as his seven core commitments of biblical preaching:

1. The Bible is the Word of God.
2. The entire Bible is the Word of God.
3. The Bible is self-authenticating.
4. This leads to a "Thus saith the Lord" approach to preaching.
5. The student of the Bible must try to get at the intent of the biblical writer.
6. The Bible is a book about God.
7. We don't "make the Bible relevant"; we show its relevance.⁴⁴

The fidelity to the text that both Stott and Robinson hold to is also championed by Jay Adams. There is a lot of overlap in these three homileticians' core convictions. Adams aptly comments: "What we truly believe determines what we do. What we believe in our heart of hearts about preaching will determine how we carry it out. In that sense, nothing can be more practical than our theology of preaching."⁴⁵ He lists nine beliefs that lie at the heart of biblical preaching:

1. The ultimate aim of preaching is to please God.
2. Preaching pleases God only when it is true to Scripture.
3. The Scriptures are the inerrant, inspired word of God written.
4. Preaching is a sacred responsibility.
5. The Scriptures were intended not only for the original hearers but for our unique hearers today.
6. The original intent of the text controls its message to hearers today.
7. The subject of every message is God and people.
8. Clarity is paramount.

⁴³ Ibid., 24-29.

⁴⁴ Haddon Robinson, *Convictions of Biblical Preaching*, in *The Art & Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today's Communicators*, ed. by Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 23-24.

⁴⁵ Jay E. Adams, *Theology of Powerful Preaching*, in *The Art & Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today's Communicators*, ed. by Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 33.

9. Our duty is to preach boldly.⁴⁶

What Stott, Robinson and Adams reveal in their shared convictions is that expository preaching is more a philosophy than a method. Their similar philosophies of expository preaching are built upon certain core convictions that are all tied to the authoritative character of God's Word.

Greidanus gives a wonderful summary of what lies at the heart of expository preaching:

Expository preaching is "Bible-centered preaching." That is, it is handling the text "in such a way that its real and essential meaning as it existed in the mind of the particular biblical writer and as it exists in the light of the over-all context of Scripture is made plain and applied to the present-day needs of the hearers." Thus one might say that expository preaching is preaching biblically. But "expository preaching" is more than a mere synonym for biblical preaching; it describes what is involved in biblical preaching, namely, the exposition of a biblical passage (or passages).⁴⁷

This is why Stott can conclude: "If expository preaching means 'setting forth' biblical truth (and it literally does), then all preaching should be expository.... All authentic preaching is exposition of Scripture."⁴⁸

This chapter addressed three questions of crucial importance: Why should the Church preach in the first place? Where is the authority for expository preaching? What is the essence of expository preaching? We stated that the Church should preach because God has spoken and because God has commissioned the Church to do so.

As to the *authority* of expository preaching, we determined that the preacher stands on solid ground when the message preached is clearly derived from the biblical

⁴⁶ Ibid., 33-36.

⁴⁷ Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher*, 11.

⁴⁸ Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 125.

text. The preacher's authority comes from God. Such preaching, anointed by the Holy Spirit, is empowered and authorized by God himself.

With regard to the *essence* of expository preaching, this form of proclamation is more a way of thinking than a method. A truly expository sermon is rooted in solid exegesis and demonstrates a thoroughgoing commitment to communicating God's message to his original hearers once again to a contemporary audience.

Laypeople who will be trained to "say what God has said" need to comprehend the *primacy of*, the *authority for*, and the *essence of* expository preaching.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

The field of homiletics is blessed with some wonderful resources and as with any field of study there are varying degrees of quality. The purpose of this focused review is to highlight some of the books most relevant to this thesis-project. These books will be immensely helpful to anyone who wishes to lead the seminars found in chapter four.

ESSENTIAL BOOKS FOR THE TEACHER OF EXPOSITORY PREACHING

At the top of a short list of books that one must have if they desire to preach expository sermons is Haddon Robinson's *Biblical Preaching*.⁴⁹ It is recommended that a student secure the second edition. The content has not dramatically changed, but the style and examples are updated and therefore more helpful to today's reader. Robinson works from a very helpful definition of expository preaching:

Expository preaching is the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and the experience of the preacher, then through the preacher applies to the hearer.⁵⁰

Robinson shows that expository preaching is more a philosophy than a method—more a way of thinking than merely preaching verse by verse. Robinson walks the student through his philosophy of preaching and shows how sermons can be true to Scripture and relevant to today's audience. One of the most helpful aspects is doing the hard spadework of identifying the “big idea” of a text and then deriving a homiletical idea from it. He

⁴⁹ Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2001).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

stresses that an expository sermon must be true to the text but also relevant to the listeners. This second emphasis is easy to miss! One can be true to the text, yet fail to demonstrate why this biblical truth matters to those in the pew. If one was limited to purchasing only one book on expository preaching, then this book should be it. This book is true to its title. It helps a preacher to develop and delivery messages that are true to God's Word and relevant to the hearers. This Thesis-Project will be based directly on the process found in *Biblical Preaching*.

Robinson has edited a companion volume entitled, *Biblical Sermons—How Twelve Preachers Apply the Principle of Biblical preaching*.⁵¹ This volume is very helpful in allowing preachers to see the end product from some of Robinson's disciples. This book allows students to see principles in action. Although each of the contributors advocates Robinson's approach, they all have adapted it in various ways with varying degrees of success. Probably more helpful than actually reading the sermons—which is an odd way to experience a sermon—is how Robinson analyzes the messages and interviews the authors. This book is a very helpful companion to *Biblical Preaching* as it fleshes out what can feel like a very difficult philosophy to grasp.

Another of the best books on preaching is Bryan Chapell's *Christ-Centered Preaching—Redeeming the Expository Sermon*.⁵² Chapell argues that expository preaching is the form that best carries the authority and power of the biblical text. He covers both the theological considerations that need to be addressed when contending for expository preaching and the practical methodology of how it is done. His concept of the

⁵¹ Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Sermons*, Edited by Haddon W. Robinson (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989).

⁵² Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book, 1994).

“fallen condition focus” helps a preacher to demonstrate the text’s relevance for fallen humanity. This text is a great combination of solid theology and practical help for preaching expository sermons. Chapell’s book shows that he is not an ivory tower theologian but a sweaty and muddy practitioner who has honed the art and science of preaching on the front lines of pastoral ministry.

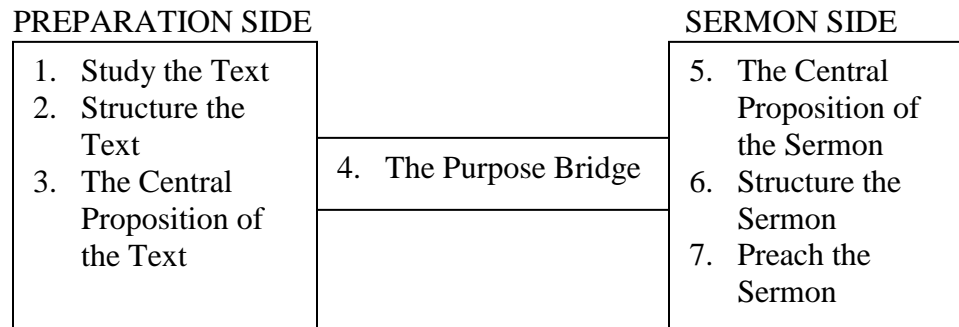
An older text but still exceedingly helpful is John Stott’s *Between Two Worlds*.⁵³ One of the gems is the section on the theological foundations for expository preaching. Stott emphasizes the need for today’s preachers to bridge the gap of the ancient text and the modern audience. A preacher stands with a foot in the biblical world and a foot in the modern world. As with all of Stott’s works there is ample nourishment for the head and the heart. This is a great text for a student new to expository preaching, although it is not as practical as either Chapell’s or Robinson’s on actual sermon preparation. His section on history is filled with confirmation from the Church throughout the ages on the necessity of preaching as an essential ministry of the Church.

Stott concludes his chapter on ‘The Glory of Preaching: A Historical Sketch’ with the words of the great D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: “There is nothing like it [i.e., preaching]. It is the greatest work in the world, the most thrilling, the most exciting, the most rewarding, and the most wonderful.”⁵⁴ Hopefully, what this discriminating sprint through the centuries lacks in comprehensiveness, it makes up for by gently pulling on the thread of the glory and primacy of preaching that runs throughout the entire fabric of ancient and recent Church history.

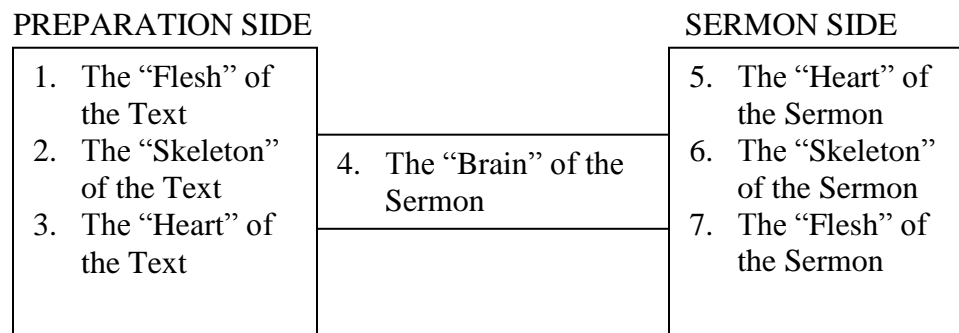
⁵³ John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. 1982).

⁵⁴ Ibid., 46.

Ramesh Richard has produced a very useful text on expository preaching called *Preparing Expository Sermons: A Seven-Step Method for Biblical Preaching*.⁵⁵ The strength of this work is its easy-to-remember seven steps. The steps of the preparation side actually correspond with the steps on the sermon side:



Dr. Richard calls his process “Scripture Sculpture.” Here is how the sculpture process actually works:



Dr. Richard makes the process easy to understand and his writing style is very clear and engaging: “The Bible is what God has made. Sermons are what we make with

⁵⁵ Ramesh Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons: A Seven-Step Method for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001).

what God has made.” Here is Robinson’s philosophy mediated through another personality.

Whereas Dr. Richard gives us the “sculpture,” Dr. Michael J. Quicke gives us the “swim” in his work: *360 Degree Preaching: Hearing, Speaking, and Living the Word*.⁵⁶ He says that the swim process includes the following five stages: (1) Immerse in Scripture; (2) Interpret for Today; (3) Design the Sermon; (4) Deliver the Sermon; and (5) Experience the Outcomes. Quicke encourages the preacher to engage all of the dynamics (Scripture, God, the preacher, the hearers, etc.) throughout the entire preaching process. There is a depth of spirituality that comes through this work; the sermon process from start to finish is not a static routine but a living encounter with the Triune God of Christianity. Quicke defines preaching as, “sharing the in-breaking of God’s good news to create a new people in new community.” His definition focuses on the transformational character of preaching, but he fails to really define his key terms. This is a very engaging yet challenging supplemental text.

HELPFUL TEXTS FOR THE TEACHER OF EXPOSITORY PREACHING

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones is the author of *Preaching & Preachers*.⁵⁷ He makes a bold case that “...preaching is the highest and greatest and the most glorious calling to which anyone can ever be called.” The strength of this book is not in its practicality but in the fact that it is centered on a theology of preaching or to put it another way; a Christian philosophy of preaching. Lloyd-Jones deals with the preacher’s character and stresses this

⁵⁶ Michael J. Quicke, *360 Degree Preaching: Hearing, Speaking, and Living the Word* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003).

⁵⁷ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching & Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972).

above a methodology. If we aren't right with God then our preaching will be all-wrong. The first and the last chapter; "The Primacy of Preaching" and "Demonstration of the Spirit and of the Power" are exceptionally stirring. Lloyd-Jones' treatment of the devaluation of preaching in the 1960s is as relevant today as it was when he originally gave these lectures. He takes issue with the Church committing to things that are not the primary task and tries to encourage her to get back on the right path. Some of his thoughts are worth revisiting:

So I would lay it down as a basic proposition that the primary task of the Church is not to educate man, is not to heal him physically or psychologically, it is not to make him happy. I will go further; it is not even to make him good. These are things that accompany salvation; and when the Church performs her true task she does incidentally educate men and give them knowledge and information, she does bring them happiness, she does make them good and better than they were. *But my point is that those are not her primary objectives. Her primary purpose is not any of these; it is rather to put man into the right relationship with God, to reconcile man to God.* This really does need to be emphasized at the present time, because this, it seems to me, is the essence of the modern fallacy. It has come into the Church and it is influencing the thinking of many in the Church—this notion that the business of the Church is to make people happy, or to integrate their lives, or to relieve their circumstances and improve their conditions. My whole case is that to do that is just to palliate the symptoms, to give temporary ease, and that it does not get beyond that.⁵⁸

Thus according to Lloyd-Jones the preacher is the only one who stands in a position to truly eradicate the great disease of sin that is killing the world.⁵⁹ He calls the Church back to her primary purpose of preaching and states that she alone can do this. The Church has been given the task of preaching the gospel and this undertaking is the only hope of humanity. Regrettably we suffer from myopia, far too often the Church

⁵⁸ Ibid., 30.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 29: "The moment we realize man's true need and see the only answer, it becomes clear that only those who are in possession of this understanding can impart this message to those who lack it."

becomes convinced that her primary calling is to make people feel better, but even when this stems from compassionate motives it has negative consequences.

Lloyd-Jones shows that to mask the symptoms and yet overlook the real problem is to fail miserably in the Church's main vocation. When the Church departs from her primary calling—preaching—she abandons society and is responsible in a large degree for its sorry state of existence. But when the Church is true to her principal task we see not only the disease but also the symptoms being treated. The Church of Jesus Christ must never be satisfied with merely treating symptoms, she must take up the scalpel of God's proclaimed Word and let the Great Physician do the surgery that He alone can perform. Lloyd-Jones rejected all the modern substitutes for preaching in his day; we would be wise to do the same in our own day.

A helpful book that deals with a philosophy of preaching is Calvin Miller's *Spirit, Word, and Story—A Philosophy of Marketplace Preaching*.⁶⁰ This book does not advocate a specific system or philosophy of preaching as such, but it does help preachers to refine the gifts they have and to work at developing weaker areas. Miller is very helpful in the area of creativity. His key elements for preaching are spirit, word, and story. This book is written by a pastor of pastors. Wisdom drips from its pages; Miller's heart for preachers and passion for preaching is clearly evident.

⁶⁰ Calvin Miller, *Spirit, Word, and Story—A Philosophy of Marketplace Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996).

BOOKS ON LITERARY FORMS

*How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*⁶¹ by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart is a most helpful book on understanding the impact literary forms have on hermeneutical issues. Part of the key to understanding a passage is determining the book's genre. Understanding the different genres helps a student to ask the right questions. Fee and Stuart also provide a very helpful section on "must have" commentaries.

Fee and Stuart have also combine on a more recent work *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*⁶² that is of great assistance in the exegetical process. They provide a bird's eye view of each of the sixty-six books of the Bible. They provide the big picture and then offer specific advice for reading each of the particular books. The strength of this work isn't in the details, but in the solid overview. They actually walk through each of the major sections of a book to highlight the flow of the author's thoughts. *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* and *How to Read the Bible Book by Book* are very practical tools that are written in an engaging style. They will be referred to again and again by those committed to expository preaching.

Thomas G. Long's *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible*⁶³ is specifically oriented towards preaching. Long shares the belief that literary form should impact how a preacher preaches a text. In other words, Long believes that "how" a text says something is vitally important in going from the ancient text to the modern sermon. The task of the preacher according to Long is to recreate the impact of the text. He treats the following

⁶¹, Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, Third Edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003).

⁶² Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002).

⁶³ Thomas G. Long, *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989).

literary forms: psalms, proverbs, narratives, parables, and epistles. This book's impact is much greater than its size; it is a very handy volume that contributes much to understanding the relationship between literary forms and preaching.

A much more extensive treatment of preaching forms and styles is Sidney Greidanus' *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*.⁶⁴ Greidanus gives a holistic approach to hermeneutics and homiletics. The opening chapter "Biblical Preaching" is worth the price of the text, but then one wades in and finds Greidanus both comprehensive and scholarly. He provides valuable guidelines for interpreting and preaching four specific genres: Hebrew narratives, prophetic literature, gospel, and epistle. Greidanus provides a text that helps preachers navigate the tricky riptides of biblical interpretation so that they can sail in the wide-open seas of homiletics. This book is more complex than Fee and Stewart's *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, but for a more-advanced student, it provides substantial depth to this rich topic. Greidanus' *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*⁶⁵ offers a contemporary hermeneutical method to the student who wants to faithfully preach Christian messages from the Old Testament. This book helps a preacher to wrestle with how the centrality of the cross impacts all of our preaching. Jesus Christ's life, death, and resurrection change everything—including how a Christian preaches the Old Testament passages.

⁶⁴ Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988).

⁶⁵ Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999).

EDITED VOLUMES ON PREACHING

Three edited volumes are helpful to students wanting a broad range of topics that cover the entire gamut of homiletics. Michael Duduit's *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*⁶⁶ is a collection of essays that will help a pastor to prepare and deliver effective sermons. It is comprehensive in scope and covers eight areas: The Roots of Contemporary Preaching; Contemporary Preaching Methods; Preparing the Sermon; Preaching and the Biblical Text; Presenting the Sermon; Preaching and the Ministry; Preaching to the Needs of People; and Special Concerns in Contemporary Preaching. It also offers an exhaustive bibliography on preaching resources. The articles vary greatly in both quality and usefulness, but some articles are exceptional. An example of a very good chapter is *A Theology of Preaching* by R. Albert Mohler Jr.

Another edited volume, is Robinson and Larson's recent *The Art & Craft of Biblical Preaching*.⁶⁷ Here is sound advice from some of evangelical Christianity's finest homileticians. This text is broken into eleven sections and novice and veteran preachers will find valuable information in this comprehensive volume that includes over two hundred chapters. One chapter in particular is Robertson McQuilkin's piece, "Connecting with Postmoderns" which has some key suggestions for biblical communicators.⁶⁸ The subtitle contains the basic structure of his essay: *What to adopt, what to adapt, what to*

⁶⁶ Michael Duduit, Editor, *Handbook on Contemporary Preaching* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers. 1992).

⁶⁷ Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson, Editors, *The Art & Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today's Communicators* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005).

⁶⁸ Robertson McQuilkin, *Connecting with Postmoderns: What to adopt, what to adapt, what to oppose in postmodernism*, in *The Art & Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today's Communicators*, ed. by Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 174-176.

oppose in postmodernism. Understanding what to adopt, adapt, and oppose in postmodernism can help communicators share the great news that “Jesus, crucified and risen Messiah, is Lord.”⁶⁹

A third edited text, which makes a good reference work for a homiletics class is *The Big Idea of Biblical Preaching*⁷⁰ edited by Keith Wilhite and Scott M. Gibson. This text is much more limited in scope than the previous two volumes but it is more focused on one style of preaching—expository. This book is written in honor of Haddon Robinson, one of evangelical Christianity’s leading teachers of preaching. The title comes from the fact that Robinson has been arguing for decades that “a sermon should be a bullet not buckshot.” Part one presents the strength of preaching with a single dominant idea. Part two shows the biblical and theological foundations that underpin Robinson’s homiletical method. The third section focuses on communicating the big idea. This is a useful book for reinforcing the concept of “big idea” preaching.

TEXTS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF ENGAGING TODAY’S AUDIENCE

*Preaching That Connects*⁷¹ by Mark Galli and Craig Brian Larson, helps preachers to communicate in a way that is both effective and engaging. Galli and Larson show how the same keys for effective communication in the media can be applied to homiletics. These journalistic techniques work for advertisers and news broadcasters and

⁶⁹ N. T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 46.

⁷⁰ Keith Willhite and Scott M. Gibson, Editors, *The Big Idea of Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998).

⁷¹ Mark Galli and Craig Brian Larson, *Preaching That Connects* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994).

the preacher is shown how these techniques can help to communicate the life changing message of Jesus Christ from the pulpit.

Another work that focuses on preaching in a way that makes an impact is Keith Willhites' *Preaching With Relevance Without Dumbing Down*.⁷² He gives ten strategies for communication relevance in expository preaching. He argues that a good communicator is also a good observer, who utilizes his or her experiences and observations to connect with the audience.

Alice P. Matthews' tells us that many times preachers are missing more than half of their audience because of the way they preach. In *Preaching That Speaks to Women*,⁷³ Matthews takes men inside alien territory and thoughtfully challenges them to give proper care and consideration to a very important segment of the body of Jesus Christ. The gospel is for both women and men, and it is imperative that preachers work on communicating in a way that impacts both sexes.

David W. Henderson helps the biblical communicator to understand the postmodern landscape so that today's audience can be more effectively engaged. In his book, *Culture Shift—Communicating God's Truth to Our Changing World*,⁷⁴ Henderson shows the changes that have taken place in our culture so that we can preach so that modern ears can hear the message. The need to adjust communication style to win a hearing for the gospel is as old as the Apostle Paul— "I have become all things to all

⁷² Keith Willhite, *Preaching With Relevance Without Dumbing Down* (Grand Rapids: Kregal Publications, 2001).

⁷³ Alice P. Matthews, *Preaching That Speaks to Women* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2003).

⁷⁴ David W. Henderson, *Culture Shift: Communicating God's Truth in Our Changing World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998).

people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings” (1 Corinthians 9:22b-23).

In *It's All in How You Tell It—Preaching First-Person Expository Messages*,⁷⁵ Haddon and Torrey Robinson show today's preachers how to be creative. Jesus used methods of communication like the parables to capture imaginations by detonating the gospel in unguarded hearts. Today's audience can be thrown off balance in a great way by preachers who will employ preaching first-person expository messages. If the old adage has any truth to it—*variety is the spice of life*—then this style can be used to “spice up” our sermons to a culture that understands the power of a story well told. Preachers can get into ruts, preaching the same styles of messages every Sunday. This method provides another option that seems to be well suited to today's culture.

THE KEY TO EFFECTIVE TEACHING

The last book in this review is Robert F. Mager's *Preparing Instructional Objectives—A Critical Tool in the Development of Effective Instruction*.⁷⁶ The focus of this book is to help teachers to do a better job of teaching. Mager argues in this work that instruction is effective to the degree that it succeeds in changing students in desired directions and not in undesired directions. Mager tells us that successful instructors are those whose teaching accomplishes what it set out to accomplish. The insights from this book along with the 2004 class notes of Dr. Sid Buzzell will be used to develop the lesson plans for this work's thesis project.

⁷⁵ Haddon W. Robinson and Torrey W. Robinson, *It's All in How You Tell It: Preaching First-Person Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003).

⁷⁶ Robert F. Mager, *Preparing Instructional Objectives: A Critical Tool In the Development of Effective Instruction*, Third Edition (Atlanta: The Center for Effective Performance, Inc., 1997).

These are some of the texts that can greatly aid a person who is looking to be educated in the philosophy and practice of expository sermons. While not exhaustive, this literature review will provide the necessary resources for those who wish to teach lay people how to say what God has said.

CHAPTER FOUR

THESIS-PROJECT

The following three seminars are designed to train lay leaders who have had limited training in preaching. The course is designed to take place in three different four-hour seminars. Since the information presented in these seminars will be entirely new for most of the participants, the course is not designed to be exhaustive. It will introduce the philosophy of expository preaching and will allow the participants to acquire a set of skills along the way. If the participants internalize a cursory knowledge of the basics of expository preaching and develop a passionate commitment to it, then the student will be on his or her way toward becoming an effective preacher and these seminars will have been a success.

The participants will not be required to read any texts and they will not be asked to come prepared to the seminars. Many of the participants are already intimidated. They think this task is far beyond their abilities and exceeds their limited time constraints. The hope is to show them that a normal person can prepare an effective sermon that is both biblical and relevant. So, rather than scaring them off before the process is started, they will be encouraged to take small manageable steps. Therefore, the nature of the seminars will be that of introduction. By the end of the seminars the participants will be able to: (1) Discover the idea – Learn how to *identify* the “Big Idea” of a biblical passage; (2) Develop the idea – Learn how to logically *develop* the biblical idea for presentation to a target audience; (3) Deliver the idea – Learn how to implement a few key steps *to communicate* the logically-developed biblical idea to a target audience.

These seminars are designed to be a springboard that will launch the participants into a deeper appreciation and a richer understanding of this philosophy of preaching. Seminars one, two, and three are the first three rungs on the homiletical ladder.

Designed around the concept of “idea” these seminars show the participants that expository preachers are committed to three different phases that progress from the text to the sermon (the discovery phase, the development phase and the delivery phase). By the end of the three seminars it will be clear to the participants that those who want to preach biblical sermons need to have a basic understanding of expository theory and the practical skills that will help them to communicate effectively.

The seminars operate from the assumption that the best way to learn is to actually get involved in the process. Thus, there are many exercises included to develop the skills necessary to become an effective lay preacher. These learning activities include group exercises designed to build confidence. A number of the exercises are for small groups of two or three participants to work on together. This way the students can help each other grow in the homiletical process. There are also a few individual exercises intended to demonstrate the students’ individual process mastery apart from the group context. Throughout all the exercises, the facilitator should be available to make sure that the participants understand the process.

The seminars are heavily dependent on Dr. Haddon Robinson’s book *Biblical Preaching*. Many of the examples and illustrations are taken directly from this book. Since it is assumed that the participants will have had little to no formal theological training, the seminars will act like a primer that will hopefully allow them to gain a deeper understanding once they read Dr. Robinson’s seminal text for themselves.

The pastor who facilitates this course will need to have a solid working knowledge of Dr. Robinson's *Biblical Preaching* in order to lead these seminars adequately so it is strongly recommended that Robinson's text be thoroughly digested prior to leading participants through this material.

SEMINAR – DISCOVER THE IDEA – Part One of Three

DISCOVER THE IDEA: Learn how to *identify* the “Big Idea” of a biblical passage.

PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES: As a result of attending this seminar each participant should be able to:

1. Define the term “idea” as used in this seminar.
2. Explain how ideas form.
3. Describe and apply the process of identifying the writer’s idea(s) in a literary passage.
4. Develop the skill of stating an idea so that it is an accurate representation of the text.

LESSON PLAN:

- I. Selection Process – Prior to the seminars the facilitator should select participants whom the Spirit has gifted in teaching and preaching. Those who are currently leading effective small groups and Bible studies are great candidates. A group of five or six creates a nice small group dynamic, but smaller groups provide an opportunity for more individual attention.
- II. Introduction to the seminar—part one of three.
 - A. Welcome – Welcome everyone to the seminar.
 - B. Introductions – Allow for introductions if the participants are not acquainted with each other.
 - C. We are going to look at a method of studying biblical passages to get the big idea from them; we will go through some exercises which will help us understand this process. But before we do this I will give some reasons why I believe this is essential to clear biblical preaching. And we will look at some of the theory behind this.
- III. Powerful biblical communicators are anchored to two core realities.
 - A. First, powerful biblical communicators are anchored to the truth that the battle for humanity takes place in the realm of thought—at the level of ideas not words.

B. Second, powerful biblical communicators are anchored to saying what God has said—we are to communicate His ideas not our own.

- Group Exercises – In groups of two or three answer the these questions about the following paragraphs: (1) What exactly is the author talking about? (2) What precisely is the author saying about what he is talking about? Here the facilitator is actually involving the students in the “Big Idea” discovery process by exposing them to two quotes that summarize the nature of expository preaching. The process will become more explicit in the following pages. This exercise will engage the students to two pregnant quotes on the philosophy of expository preaching and it will expose them to the process of identifying the “big idea.”

1. Dr. John Stott → It is my contention that all true Christian preaching is expository preaching. Of course if by an ‘expository’ sermon is meant a verse-by-verse explanation of a lengthy passage of Scripture, then indeed it is only one possible way of preaching, but this would be a misuse of the word. Properly speaking, ‘exposition’ has a much broader meaning. It refers to the content of the sermon (biblical truth) rather than its style (a running commentary). To expound Scripture is to bring out of the text what is there and expose it to view. The expositor pries open what appears to be closed, makes plain what is obscure, unravels what is knotted and unfolds what is tightly packed. The opposite of exposition is ‘imposition’, which is to impose on the text what is not there. But the ‘text’ in question could be a verse, or a sentence, or even a single word. It could equally be a paragraph, or a chapter, or a whole book. The size of the text is immaterial, so long as it is biblical. What matters is what we do with it. Whether it is long or short, our responsibility as expositors is to open it up in such a way that it speaks its message clearly, plainly, accurately, relevantly, without addition, subtraction or falsification. In expository preaching the biblical text is neither a conventional introduction to a sermon on a largely different theme, nor a convenient peg on which to hang a ragbag of miscellaneous thoughts, but a master which dictates and controls what is said.⁷⁷

2. Dr. Haddon Robinson → Expository preaching at its core is more a philosophy than a method. Whether or not we can be called expositors starts with our purpose and with our honest answer to the question: “Do you, as a preacher, endeavor to bend your thought to the Scriptures, or do you use the Scriptures to support your thought?” This is not the same question as, “Is what you are preaching orthodox or evangelical?” Nor is it the same as, “Do you hold a high view of the

⁷⁷ Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 126-127.

Bible or believe it to be the infallible Word of God?” As important as these questions may appear in other circumstances, a passing grade in systematic theology does not qualify an individual as an expositor of the Bible. Theology may protect us from evils lurking in atomistic, nearsighted interpretations, but at the same time it may blind us from seeing the text. In approaching a passage, we must be willing to reexamine our doctrinal convictions and to reject the judgments of our most respected teachers. We must make a U-turn in our own previous understandings of the Bible should these conflict with the concepts of the biblical writer.⁷⁸

(Insofar as preaching a single dominant thought is key to powerful biblical communication, then knowing how to find that central, unifying idea is of the utmost importance.)

IV. Defining an idea and knowing how ideas form.

A. What do we mean by an *idea*?

1. History of the word “idea.” It came into English from Greek. The Greek Word *eido*, which means “to see” and therefore “to know.” An idea sometimes enables us to see what was previously unclear.⁷⁹
2. The ability to think by *abstracting* and *synthesizing* is a sign of maturity.
 - a. *Small child blessing a meal* – God thank you for the hotdogs, the buns, the mustard, the Coke, and the chocolate chip cookies. Have you noticed how small children think in particulars?
 - b. *Adult blessing a meal* – God we thank you for the *food* that you have placed before us. Adults can abstract and synthesize.
3. *Idea*—a distillation of life that abstracts out of the particulars of experience what they have in common and relates them to each other.⁸⁰
 - a. Ideas help us to make sense out of life.
 - b. Adults learn to abstract and synthesize through time and with experience.

⁷⁸Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 22.

⁷⁹Ibid., 39.

⁸⁰Ibid., 23.

c. The process of distillation is such a common part of life that most of the time we aren't even conscious that we are doing it—it's intuitive—second nature.

- 1) Cocker Spaniels, German Shepherds, Labrador Retrievers, Poodles, and Weimaraners = DOGS.
- 2) Bananas, Oranges, Apples, Pears, and Peaches = FRUIT.
- 3) Cowboys, Redskins, Eagles, and Giants = NFL TEAMS.

(To define an idea meticulously, we must understand how ideas are formed. How are ideas formed?)

B. Combining the answer and the question(s) forms ideas.

1. The basic structure of an idea can be reduced to two essential elements: [*question*] and [*answer*].⁸¹
 - a. When we talk about a *question* of an idea, we mean the complete, definite answer to the question, "What am I talking about?"
 - b. The *answer* addresses the question, "What exactly am I saying about what I'm talking about?" It is only when a *question* and an *answer* are joined that an idea emerges.
2. Helpful hints in working with *questions* and *answers*:
 - a. For our purposes, it is also helpful to remember that a *question* cannot stand-alone, it needs something to complete it—an *answer*.
 - An idea emerges only when the *answer* is joined to a definite *question*.
 - b. There can only be one *question*, but there can be multiple *answers*.
 - c. Behind every subject there is a question either stated or implied.
 - The importance of faith... *What is the importance of faith?*
 - The people God justifies... *Who are the people God justifies?*

⁸¹ Ibid., 41.

- The test of a person's character... *What is the test of a person's character?*

(Finding the question and answer does not start when we begin construction of our sermons. We pursue the question and answer when we study the biblical text. How do we find the Big Idea?)

V. We find the "Big Idea" by studying the text.

A. Study the Text — to determine the question and its answer (i.e., the *structure* of the idea).

1. Get the Big Picture – read the chapter in *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*⁸² that corresponds to the book of the Bible that you will be studying to get the big picture (i.e., the full context) of what is going on in the text. Pay special attention to and take notes on:
 - a. Orienting Data for the book (e.g., Content, Author, Date, Recipients, and Emphasis).
 - b. Overview for the book.
 - c. Specific advice for reading the book.
 - d. A walk through the book.
 - e. Read the entire book of the Bible that contains the text you will be preaching from.
2. Identify the Genre – Read the chapter in *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*⁸³ that corresponds to the appropriate genre that this passage falls under to insure that you understand how this type of literature functions.
3. Read the passage – Fee and Stuart suggest that if one regularly reads the TNIV or NIV, and then confers with at least one from three other categories (NRSV/NASU, GNB/NAB or REB/NJB), that this will give the best possible start to an intelligent reading and study of the Bible.⁸⁴
4. Bombard the text with questions – Ask questions that will help you to grasp what is going on in the text (e.g., who, what, where, when, why,

⁸² Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 3rd Edition (Zondervan, 2003).

⁸³ Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book* (Zondervan, 2002).

⁸⁴ Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 53.

and how). Take note of “what is unclear” and “what bothers you” about this text.

5. Identify and list key verbs and nouns.
6. Use Biblical Resources – Allow gifted teachers and scholars to teach you by using the great resources that can take us deeper into mining the gold of the text.
 - a. Study Bible – the TNIV or NIV Study Bibles are prime examples.
 - b. Concordance – helps determine the meaning of words through usage.
 - c. Bible Dictionaries and Encyclopedias – contain articles on a wide variety of biblical subjects, including background of the Bible books and biographies of biblical characters.
 - d. Commentaries – contain information on the meaning of words, backgrounds of passages, and the argument of the writer.
 - e. Computer tools – there are numerous software programs that provide not only a wealth of information, but also can reduce research time significantly.
7. Outline the structure of the passage – Understand the flow of the author’s thought, remember that every paragraph is there to contribute something... no paragraph is just “there.” Outlining will help you to see what the author is emphasizing.
8. Articulate the Big Idea – It might take 8-10 hours of working on steps 1-7 before you are able to clearly and concisely articulate the Big Idea.
 - a. Question: What exactly is the author talking about?
 - b. Answer: What precisely is the author saying about what he is talking about?
 - c. Big Idea: Combine the “question” and “answer” into a single summary sentence that is true to the passage and relevant to the target audience.
 - d. Purpose (text): State the purpose of the text... what the author of the text was hoping would change in his original audience as a result of encountering God in this text.

9. Examples of the “Big Idea” articulated (taken from Robinson’s *Biblical Preaching*):

- a. The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you. An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Since an overseer manages God’s household, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it. (Titus 1:5-9)

Question: What are the qualifications for leaders in the church?

Answer: They must be ‘blameless.’

Big Idea: Qualified leaders in the church are to be blameless in their family life, personal life, and ministry.⁸⁵

Purpose: To help the church in selecting qualified leaders.

- b. We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers. We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Lord’s message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, for they themselves report what happened when we visited you. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath. (1 Thessalonians 1:2-10)

⁸⁵ Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 78.

Question: Why should we regularly thank God for the Christians we know?

Answer: Because God has brought them to himself and made a noticeable difference in their lives.

Big Idea: Thank God regularly for the Christians you know because of what God has done for them and is doing through them.⁸⁶

Purpose: To encourage Christians to be thankful for what God is doing in and through the body of Christ Jesus.

- c. Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you. (1 Timothy 4:12-16)

Question: How can a young pastor win respect from the flock?

Answer: By being an example in both personal life and public ministry of the Scriptures.

Big Idea: Win respect for yourself both by the way you live and the way you teach.⁸⁷

Purpose: To instruct a young pastor on how to win respect in a local congregation.

- d. When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter. For God said, "If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt." So God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea. The Israelites went up out of Egypt ready for battle. (Exodus 13:17-18)

Question: Why does God sometimes take us down the long and torturous dirt road rather than down the quick and easy paved highway?

⁸⁶ Ibid., 104.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

Answer: Because we aren't always sufficiently prepared for an immediate arrival.

Big Idea: The shortest distance between two points may be a zigzag.⁸⁸

Purpose: To help us to see that God has a purpose behind the way He leads us.

- e. What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— because anyone who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace. (Romans 6:1-14)

Question: What changes when Christians become united with Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection?

Answer: They have died to the rule of sin and are alive to holiness.

Big Idea: You are not the person you used to be; therefore, don't handle life as you used to handle it.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Ibid., 105.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

Purpose: To help believers understand that their new identity should control everything they do.

- f. On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?” He answered, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.” But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’ “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.” (Luke 10:25-37)

Question: Who is our neighbor?

Answer: Anyone whose need we see, whose need we are in a position to meet.

Big Idea: Your neighbor is anyone whose need you see, whose need you are in a position to meet.⁹⁰

Purpose: To broaden our understanding of neighbor to enlarge the sphere of our compassionate service.

B. Fix these thoughts firmly in your head:

⁹⁰ Ibid.

1. Each paragraph, section, or subsection of Scripture contains an idea [i.e., a question and an answer(s)].
2. A passage of Scripture is not understood until the question and answer can be stated exactly.
3. As we study a passage, our goal is to determine the question and its answer(s) to discover the *structure* of the idea.
4. You cannot preach well what you do not understand—you have to wrap words around an idea if you hope to communicate it to others.
 - a. Thinking is hard work. Understanding is the foundation for communication.
 - b. We do not understand what we are reading unless we can clearly articulate the question and answer(s) of the section under study.
 - c. Exact and concise articulation is evidence of genuine comprehension and genuine comprehension is a precondition for effective communication.
 - C. S. Lewis → Power to translate is the test of really understanding one's own meaning.⁹¹
 - Haddon Robinson → If we will not—or cannot—think ourselves clear so that we say what we mean, we have no business in the pulpit.⁹²
 - J. H. Jowett → I have a conviction that no sermon is ready for preaching, not ready for writing out, until we can express its theme in a short, pregnant sentence as clear as crystal.⁹³

C. It is the responsibility of the biblical communicator to find the Big Idea!

1. Remember that the biblical authors wrote with *purpose* and *intention*, therefore each paragraph; section or subsection of Scripture is answering a question either stated or implied.

⁹¹ C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock*, edited by Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970), 98.

⁹² Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 41.

⁹³ J. H. Jowett, *The Preacher: His Life and Work*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968), 133.

2. Start by putting what the author is talking about into a general “*noun phrase*” (e.g., “temptation” or “rewards in heaven”), we can call this the *broad topic*.
3. The initial statement—the *broad topic*—is too expansive to preach. A sermon should be a bullet, not buckshot. Therefore, the *broad topic* needs to be narrowed. This will be illustrated with James 1:5-8 on the next page.
 - The broad topic can be narrowed, just by asking the *subject* in the form of a *question*; this process automatically makes the topic more exact.
 - Try each interrogative—who, what, where, when, why, and how—to see which one best fits the underlying question the author is trying to answer.
 - When you discover the question that the biblical text answers, you have the subject!
4. Remember the *question* answers: *What precisely is the author talking about in the text?* This question or sentence must be completed to have meaning.
 - Example #1 – Question: *What is the importance of faith?*
 - Example #2 – Question: *What is the test of a person’s character?*
5. Then this “question” can be turned back into an “incomplete sentence” to which you can add the complement (*continuing with the examples in #4 above*).
 - Example #1 – Incomplete sentence: *The importance of faith is...*
 - Example #2 – Incomplete sentence: *The test of a person’s character is...*
6. Remember that the *answer* completes the question: *What exactly is the author saying about what he’s talking about in the text?*
7. The combination of the *answer* and the *question* in *natural* language becomes the “Big Idea.”
 - Stating the idea in the language of the biblical writer is known as an *exegetical* or *textual idea* (i.e., the *Big Idea* of the text).

- Restating the exegetical idea in the language of today's audience is known as the *Big Idea* of the sermon (see James 1:5-8 below).
8. The Big Idea is the *dominant thrust* of the passage. It is the *heart of the text*. It is the *take home truth*, that we want the people to remember if they remember nothing else.

(It is often easier to grasp a concept by working with concrete examples, so let's take some time to work on a passage of Scripture to get a handle on this "Big Idea Concept.")

D. Let's get our hands dirty by working on an example.

1. If any of you lacks *wisdom*, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. Those who doubt should not think they will receive anything from the Lord; they are double-minded and unstable in all they do. (James 1:5-8)

Broad topic: Wisdom (notice this is still much too broad because James does not discuss *what wisdom is*, *why we need it*, or *when we need it*).

Now we narrow the subject making a question out of the broad topic.

Question: *How* do we obtain wisdom? (But this is still too broad! We must study context verses 2-4 to sharpen the focus.)

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face *trials* of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. (James 1:2-4)

Dr. Haddon Robinson – "When a proposed subject accurately describes what the author is talking about, it illuminates the details of the passage; and the subject, in turn, will be illuminated by the details."⁹⁴

- **Question:** How do we obtain *wisdom* in the midst of *trials*?
 - **Incomplete sentence:** Wisdom is obtained in the midst of trials when we...
- **Answer:** Ask God for it in faith.

⁹⁴ Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 67.

- **Big Idea:** When in the midst of a trial our first number on speed dial should be ‘Heaven’ so that we can ask God in faith for wisdom.

(Let me make a bold assertion... by mastering this one skill, you can dramatically improve your own understanding of the text and both the quality and effectiveness of your biblical communication. Let’s strengthen this skill through some more exercises.)

2. Exercises to Strengthen the Skill of Discovering the Big Idea.

a. Four reminders:

- 1) Finding the Big Idea is *the hardest, the most exacting, and the most fruitful labor in Bible study*. It might take you 8-10 hours just to crystallize the Big Idea from a difficult passage.
- 2) Note that the “question” should not lead to a yes/no answer (e.g., “Can we trust God to sovereignly control our lives for good?”). Such yes/no questions are not finding the Big Idea, but they are simply asking for an affirmation or denial of an already assumed Big Idea. Instead, the question should begin with one of the interrogatives: who, what, when, where, why, how? (e.g., “What can we trust God to do?”).
- 3) An idea can have only *one* question, but may have *multiple* answers.
- 4) WHY DOES THIS WORK? The reason this question/answer approach works is because underneath every statement or assertion of fact, or paragraph of information, there is an assumed question.

- b. Let’s practice... Each of the exercises in all three sets starts out easy but then grows increasingly difficult. The progression from large group, to small groups, to individuals is designed to strengthen the confidence in the individual participants. First, the entire group works with the facilitator to find the question and answer (exercises 1-4). Second, the group is separated into small groups of dyads and triads who will work together to find the subject and complement (exercises 5-8). Third, individuals will now work on their own to find the question and answer (exercises 9-13). *Participant handouts are found below and the answers at the end of this section starting on page 71.*

Entire Group Exercises on Discovering the “Big Idea” – Handout

To build confidence in the participants, the entire group will work on the first four examples with the help of the facilitator.

1. On Saturday morning, Ron needs to cut, edge, weed-eat, and water his lawn.

Question: _____

- Incomplete sentence: _____

Answer: _____

2. Today’s pulpit has lost its authority because it has largely ignored the Bible as the source of its message.⁹⁵

Question: _____

- Incomplete sentence: _____

Answer: _____

3. Attention Teenagers: If you are tired of being hassled by unreasonable parents, now is the time for action. Leave home now and pay your own way while you still know everything.⁹⁶

Question: _____

- Incomplete sentence: _____

⁹⁵ Ibid., 47.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 48.

Answer: _____

4. Blessed are those
whose transgressions are forgiven,
whose sins are covered (Psalm 32:1)

Question: _____

- Incomplete sentence: _____

Answer: _____

Big Idea: _____

Small Group Exercises on Discovering the “Big Idea” – Handout

In the first exercise (examples 1-4) the whole group worked as one team. Now the group will be divided into dyads and triads to move towards individualizing the process.

5. The feeding of the 5000

When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, “This is a remote place, and it’s already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food.”

Jesus replied, “They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.”

“We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish,” they answered.

“Bring them here to me,” he said. And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children. (Matthew 14:13-21)

The flow of the passage (general reading)

- Jesus gives the disciples a seemingly impossible task.
- They sense they are unable to do it.
- Jesus instructs them to bring whatever resources they have to him.
- He multiplies the resources so that they are entirely sufficient for the task he’s given them.

Question: _____

- Incomplete sentence: _____

Answer: _____

Big Idea: _____

6. A good sermon leaves you wondering how the preacher knew all about you.⁹⁷

Question: _____

- Incomplete sentence: _____

Answer: _____

7. The popular saying has it, “Charity begins at home.” It doesn’t. Charity begins where love connects with need.⁹⁸

Question: _____

- Incomplete sentence: _____

Answer: _____

8. Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of my Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 7:21)

Question: _____

- Incomplete sentence: _____

Answer: _____

⁹⁷ Ibid., 47.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 48.

Individual Exercises on Discovering the “Big Idea” – Handout

The exercises started with the whole group (examples 1-4) and then in the small group exercises the size was reduced to dyads and triads (examples 5-8). Each individual will now work on “one” of the following examples (exercises 9-14). Each participant will discuss their thought process with the entire group. The goal is to learn to sharpen the big idea both from the students’ successes and their “corrected” mistakes.

9. Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, “I find no pleasure in them.” (Ecclesiastes 12:1)

Question: _____

- Incomplete sentence: _____

Answer: _____

Big Idea: _____

10. Forgiveness, cannot mean that we cover up a fault with a ‘mantle of charity.’ Divine things are never an illusion and deception. On the contrary, before the sin is forgiven the mantle with which it is covered must be removed. The sin must be unmercifully—yes unmercifully—exposed to the light of God’s countenance.⁹⁹

Question: _____

- Incomplete sentence: _____

Answer: _____

⁹⁹ Ibid., 49.

Big Idea: _____

11. The young have lots of time and few memories while the elderly have lots of memories and little time.¹⁰⁰

Question: _____

- Incomplete sentence: _____

Answer: _____

Big Idea: _____

12. Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity. Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need. (1 Timothy 5:1-3)

Question: _____

- Incomplete sentence: _____

Answer: _____

Big Idea: _____

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 48.

13. Praise the LORD, all you nations;
extol him, all you peoples.
For great is his love toward us,
and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever.
Praise the LORD. (Psalm 117:1-2)

Question: _____

- Incomplete sentence: _____

Answer: _____

Big Idea: _____

VII. Conclusion to the Seminar—Part One

Charles Simeon → Reduce your text to a simple proposition, and lay that down as the warp; and then make use of the text as the woof; illustrating the main idea by the various terms in which it is contained. Screw the word into the minds of your hearers. A screw is the strongest of all mechanical powers...when it has turned a few times, scarcely any power can pull it out.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Quoted in John R. W. Stott, *I Believe in Preaching* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1982), 226.

Entire Group Exercises on Discovering the “Big Idea” – Answers

1. On Saturday morning, Ron needs to cut, edge, weed-eat, and water his lawn.

Question: What does Ron need to do to his lawn on Saturday morning?

- Incomplete sentence: Ron needs to do four things to his lawn on Saturday morning...

Answer: He needs to cut it, edge it, weed-eat it, and water it.

2. Today’s pulpit has lost its authority because it has largely ignored the Bible as the source of its message.¹⁰²

Question: Why has the modern pulpit lost its authority?

- Incomplete sentence: The modern pulpit has lost its authority because...

Answer: It has ignored the Bible.

3. Attention Teenagers: If you are tired of being hassled by unreasonable parents, now is the time for action. Leave home now and pay your own way while you still know everything.¹⁰³

Question: What should dissatisfied teenagers do?

- Incomplete sentence: Dissatisfied teens should...

Answer: Go it on their own if they think they know everything.

4. Blessed are those
whose transgressions are forgiven,
whose sins are covered (Psalm 32:1)

Question: Who are blessed?

- Incomplete sentence: Those are blessed whose...

¹⁰² Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 47.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 48.

Answer: Those whose sin the Lord has forgiven.

Big Idea: Blessed are those who receive God's forgiveness.

Small Group Exercises on Discovering the “Big Idea” – Answers

5. The feeding of the 5000

When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, “This is a remote place, and it’s already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food.”

Jesus replied, “They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.”

“We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish,” they answered.

“Bring them here to me,” he said. And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children. (Matthew 14:13-21)

The flow of the passage (general reading)

- Jesus gives the disciples a seemingly impossible task.
- They sense they are unable to do it.
- Jesus instructs them to bring whatever resources they have to him.
- He multiplies the resources so that they are entirely sufficient for the task he’s given them.

Question: How did the disciples accomplish the seemingly impossible task that Jesus gave them?

- Incomplete sentence: The disciples accomplished the seemingly impossible task that Jesus gave them...

Answer: By allowing God to multiply the resources they already had.

Big Idea: We can accomplish the seemingly impossible tasks that God gives us by allowing Him to multiply the resources we already have.

6. A good sermon leaves you wondering how the preacher knew all about you.¹⁰⁴

Question: What is the test of a good sermon?

- Incomplete sentence: The test of a good sermon is that...

Answer: It reveals what you are.

7. The popular saying has it, “Charity begins at home.” It doesn’t. Charity begins where love connects with need.¹⁰⁵

Question: Where does charity start?

- Incomplete sentence: Charity starts...

Answer: Where it connects with need.

8. Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of my Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 7: 21)

Question: Who will enter the kingdom of heaven?

- Incomplete sentence: The kingdom of heaven will be entered by...

Answer: Those who do the will of the Father.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 47.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 48.

Individual Exercises on Discovering the “Big Idea” – Answers

9. Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, “I find no pleasure in them.” (Ecclesiastes 12:1)

Question: When should you think about God?

- Incomplete sentence: You should think about God...

Answer: While you are still young.

Big Idea: It's never too early to start thinking about God.

10. Forgiveness, cannot mean that we cover up a fault with a ‘mantle of charity.’ Divine things are never an illusion and deception. On the contrary, before the sin is forgiven the mantle with which it is covered must be removed. The sin must be unmercifully—yes unmercifully—exposed to the light of God’s countenance.¹⁰⁶

Question: What is essential for forgiveness to take place?

- Incomplete sentence: For forgiveness to take place it is essential that...

Answer: Sin is exposed before God.

Big Idea: Transparency before God is a necessity for divine forgiveness.

11. The young have lots of time and few memories while the elderly have lots of memories and little time.¹⁰⁷

Question: How do the young and old differ in their memories and their time?

- Incomplete sentence: The young and old differ in their memories and their time in that...

Answer: The young have few memories and lots of time while the elderly have lots of memories and little time.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 49.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 48.

Big Idea: Life inverts as we grow old; youth have few memories and a lot of time but the elderly have lots of memories and little time.

12. Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity. Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need. (1 Timothy 5:1-3)

Question: How should we relate to others as we minister to them?

- Incomplete sentence: When ministering to others we should...

Answer: Treat them as you would members of your own family.

Big Idea: Treat your church family like your own family.

13. Praise the LORD, all you nations;
extol him, all you peoples.
For great is his love toward us,
and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever.
Praise the LORD. (Psalm 117:1-2)

Question: Why everyone should praise the Lord?

- Incomplete sentence: Everyone should praise God...

Answer: Because his love is great and his faithfulness is eternal.

Big Idea: Everyone should praise God for his great love and eternal faithfulness.

SEMINAR – DEVELOP THE IDEA – Part Two of Three

DEVELOP THE IDEA: Learn how to logically *develop* the biblical idea for presentation to a target audience.

PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES: As a result of attending this seminar each participant should be able to:

1. Name the only four things you can do to an idea.
 - Define *Restatement*.
 - Explain the three things that one can do to develop an idea.
2. Name the *three developmental questions*.
 - Discriminate between which of the three developmental questions is being primarily addressed from a list of exercises.
3. Understand how *outlining* a passage helps to show the author's emphasis.
 - Practice outlining two simple sentences.
4. Understand the importance of using *Transitions* to clarify the relationships between logical points in your presentation.
 - Review transitions for a sample sermon based on 1 Thessalonians 1:2-10.

LESSON PLAN:

Introduction: A quick review of seminar one:

1. We saw in the first seminar that an *Idea* is *a distillation of life that abstracts out of the particulars of experience what they have in common and relates them to each other.*¹⁰⁸
2. Ideas are formed by combining a *question* and an *answer*.
 - The *question* answers, "What am I talking about?"
 - The *answer* responds to the question, "What exactly am I saying about what I am talking about?"

¹⁰⁸Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 23.

3. The Big Idea is in the text, but it is not always easy to discover. Mining God's idea out of a passage can be a painstaking task, but the biblical communicator who is committed to saying what God has said knows that it is indispensable to the preaching task. Various tools and Bible study methods can help a biblical communicator to get to the heart of what God is saying in a scriptural passage.
 - Remember the quote from *J. H. Jowett* that stressed the importance of being able to articulate the Big Idea of the biblical author → "I have a conviction that no sermon is ready for preaching, not ready for writing out, until we can express its theme in a short, pregnant sentence as clear as crystal. *I find the getting of that sentence is the hardest, the most exacting, and the most fruitful labor in my study.* To compel oneself to fashion that sentence, to dismiss every word that is vague, ragged, ambiguous, to think oneself through to a form of words which defines the theme with scrupulous exactness—*this is surely one of the most vital and essential factors in the making of a sermon: and I do not think any sermon ought to be preached or even written, until that sentence has emerged, clear and lucid as a cloudless moon.*"¹⁰⁹

(Once we have uncovered the Big Idea and it can be expressed in a short, pregnant sentence that is as clear as crystal—then and only then—are we ready to move from the discovery stage to the developmental stage of crafting a biblical message.)

4. The Big Idea has to be developed so that it can be logically presented to a target audience.

(To develop an idea it is important to know that there are only a few things that can be done to an idea. What are the four things that can be done to an idea?)

- I. Only four things that can be done to an idea: *restate* it; *explain* it; *prove* it; or *apply* it.

Haddon Robinson states: "To recognize this simple fact opens the way to understanding the dynamic of thought."¹¹⁰

- A. One thing that you can do to an idea is to restate it. Restating an idea doesn't develop it, it just emphasizes it in a deeper way.

1. The definition of restatement is: "the statement of an idea in different words to clarify it or impress it upon the audience."¹¹¹

2. A biblical example of restatement:

¹⁰⁹ Jowett, *The Preacher: His Life and Work*, 133.

¹¹⁰ Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 75.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 97.

But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let that person be under God's curse! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let that person be under God's curse! (Galatians 1:8-9)

(Restatement is a tool used to highlight a thought for emphasis, but it does nothing to expand or develop an idea. If we want to preach an idea, then we must learn the dynamic of analyzing and developing it. We can analyze and develop a biblical idea by *explaining* it, *proving* it, or *applying* it. Let's take a look at the remaining three things you can do to an idea.)

B. To develop an idea, you can do one of three things: *explain* it, *prove* it, or *apply* it.

1. The first thing you can do to develop an idea is to *explain* it.

The first developmental question centers on explanation. Here the question, "What does it mean?" is answered.

This question can be directed at either the Bible or the audience. If we answer this question with the Bible in mind we will look to see if the biblical author is using the passage in a way that primarily explains his idea. If he is using the passage to explain his idea, then the biblical communicator will know that explanation is most likely going to be the primary driving force of the sermon.

If we direct the question "what does it mean?" towards the audience, then their knowledge of what the author is talking about will be explored. If some of the thoughts of the biblical author are unfamiliar with the target audience, then time will need to be spent in the sermon "explaining" what he meant by the use of his concepts and phrases.

Great communicators present their ideas with clarity. If we want to impact our target audiences with the truth of God's Word, then we must grapple with the fact that our audience might not understand what the Bible is saying. A message must be understood if it is to make an impact on the hearers. The burden of clarity always rests on the biblical communicator. For a communicator, exegesis must be done on the target audience as well as the biblical passage. By explaining unfamiliar concepts and phrases in a way that the audience can understand helps them embrace the blessings and wrestle with the moral demands in God's Word.

2. The second thing you can do to develop an idea is to *prove* it.

This way of developing a thought focuses on validation. The next logical step that is made after a statement is understood is to determine whether or not we buy what the statement is selling. Thus, we ask the questions, “Is that true? Do I really believe it?”

Reasons, proofs, and illustrations can go a long way in helping our target audience accept the truth of a concept psychologically. People today are apt not to swallow something until they have chewed on it. If it is good, then they will swallow. If it doesn’t please their palate, then they are likely to spit it out. Notice how Paul appeals to the Corinthians in the following passage in order to gain psychological acceptance of the biblical fact he is conveying:

Or is it only I and Barnabas who don’t have the right not to work for a living? Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its grapes? Who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk? Do I say this merely on human authority? Doesn’t the Law say the same thing? For it is written in the Law of Moses: “Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain.” Is it about oxen that God is concerned? Surely he says this for us, doesn’t he? Yes, this was written for us, because when farmers plow and thresh, they should be able to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest. If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? If others have this right of support from you, shouldn’t we have it all the more? But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ. (1 Corinthians 9:6-12)

I worked at a church once where I was teaching on Romans 12:17, the place where Paul exhorts Christians to never repay anyone evil for evil. Two different people came up to me after the study telling me that they didn’t agree with that teaching. The essence of their argument was that if another person deals out dirt, it is okay to give it back in spades. In order to allow these two people to engage God’s word at a level which can lead to transformation, then I was going to have to give reasons, offer proofs, and possibly illustrate how this biblical command should be accepted by *all* followers of Christ. I was somewhat surprised that they didn’t just accept it because it was clearly stated in the Bible. But, I came to see that to assume that someone will and should accept something because it is in the Bible misses the point that today’s audiences are wired with suspicion rather than blind faith.

- How might we seek to prove the biblical idea of non-retaliation in a way that helps skeptics embrace this teaching?

Developing an idea through validation is nothing more than affirming the truth that good theology “works” in real life. It corresponds to the way things really are. If people can see this plainly, they are less likely to dismiss what we are teaching.

We must assume that there are cynics in the pews, not to do so is to practice homiletical naïveté. If we hope to reach more than those who are already convinced, then we need to do the hard work of asking the validation questions: Is it true? Do I believe this? Will my target audience buy what I am selling?

(Thus far, we have seen that to develop a biblical idea, you can explain it or prove it. What is the last thing that can be done to an idea to develop it?)

3. The third and final thing one can do to develop an idea is to *apply* it so that it can be understood and believed.

Here we want to answer the questions that will allow the message to make an impact on Monday morning. The developmental question that grows out of application answers the questions: “So what? What difference does it make?”

We have to offer concrete applications to the truths we are teaching. If a person walks out of church without knowing how to apply the biblical truth to their life, then we have failed in our role as a spokes-person for God. God’s proclaimed word should always be a royal summons to alter our lives.

The road to application can be perilous and the biblical communicator must proceed with extreme caution. Poor application is a breeding ground for various strands of heresy.

To make proper application, we must know how the biblical author applied the text to his original audience. If the relationship between the people then and the audience now is a close one, then we can trust the application to be more direct. When the relationship is more distant, then applying the text becomes more difficult.

Our applications should always arise out of the theological purposes of the original author. If we are confused on the biblical context in which the

situations originally arose, then we can be sure that our application of the text(s) will be just as muddled.

To safeguard against improper applications we will do well to remember that our applications must emerge from the original intent of the biblical text. If our applications violate the author's original intention, then we can rest assured they don't carry the endorsement of God.¹¹²

(Let's quickly review. There are only four things you can do an idea: restate it, explain it, prove it, or apply it. There is nothing more that can be done to an idea. Restatement—is the statement of an idea in different words to clarify it or to impress it upon an audience.¹¹³ The three developmental questions are: (1) What does it mean? The question explores explanation. (2) Is it true? Do I believe it? This question explores validity. (3) So what? What difference does it make? This question explores implications and applications.¹¹⁴ Sometimes it is easier to grasp a concept by working with concrete examples, so let's take some time to work with some exercises that will help us to sharpen some skills we already have and to strengthen our grip on the developmental questions.)

C. Exercises to strengthen skills needed to communicate in both a biblical and relevant manner.¹¹⁵

¹¹² Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*. Frequent consultation of this work will keep the necessary exegetical and hermeneutical questions before the biblical communicator.

¹¹³ Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 97.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 97-100.

Developmental Questions Exercises – Handout

Determine the question and answer in the following exercises. In addition indicate what developmental question you think the author answers. Note to facilitator: Give the group a chance to work through the examples one at a time and then provide immediate feedback.

1. The reason you can't teach an old dog new tricks is not that he is incapable of learning them. It is that he is quite content with his mastery of the old tricks, and thinks that learning new tricks is strictly for puppies. Besides, he is busy paying off the mortgage on the dog house.¹¹⁶

Question: _____

- Incomplete sentence: _____

Answer: _____

Developmental question being addressed: _____

2. The powerful voice of God warns of judgment, and the same voice expresses His compassion for those who come back to Him in His given way. We are to listen with the same intensity of awe we feel when we observe the power of water. His spoken truth is not for us to judge or edit; we are to listen, absorb, understand, and bow.¹¹⁷

Question: _____

- Incomplete sentence: _____

Answer: _____

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 97.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

Developmental question being addressed: _____

3. The best thing you can do for your golf this winter is look in a mirror. A full-length mirror is a valuable learning aid. With it you can make valuable improvement, particularly in your set-up position and putting.¹¹⁸

Question: _____

- Incomplete sentence: _____

Answer: _____

Developmental question being addressed: _____

4. Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not murder,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not covet,” and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. (Romans 13:8-10)

Question: _____

- Incomplete sentence: _____

Answer: _____

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

Developmental question being addressed: _____

5. A Chinese boy who wanted to learn about jade went to study with a talented old teacher. This gentleman put a piece of the stone into the youth's hand and told him to hold it tight. Then he began to talk of philosophy, men, women, the sun and almost everything under it. After an hour he took back the stone and sent the boy home. The procedure was repeated for weeks. The boy became frustrated—when would he be told about jade?—but he was too polite to interrupt his venerable teacher. Then one day when the old man put a stone into his hands, the boy cried out instantly, “That’s not jade!”¹¹⁹

Question: _____

- Incomplete sentence: _____

Answer: _____

Developmental question being addressed: _____

6. Rudolph Fellner reminds his classes at Carnegie-Mellon University that ‘melody exists only in your memory, for at any given moment you are hearing only one note of the tune.’ Music is a cumulative art. It is a change of sounds through time, each sound taking its meaning from those that have gone before it. It is not the art for amnesiacs.¹²⁰

Question: _____

- Incomplete sentence: _____

Answer: _____

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 97-98.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 98.

Developmental question being addressed: _____

7. I shall pass through this life but once.
Any good, therefore, that I can do
Or any kindness I can show to any fellow creature,
Let me do it now.
Let me not defer or neglect it,
For I shall not pass this way again.¹²¹

Question: _____

- Incomplete sentence: _____
-

Answer: _____

Developmental question being addressed: _____

8. Work today has lost many traditional characteristics; so has play. Play has increasingly been transformed into organized sports, and sports in turn increasingly resemble work in the arduous practice and preparation, in the intense involvement of coaches and athletes (in the spirit of work), and in actual economic productivity. In a final paradox only those sports which began as work—that is, hunting and fishing—are now dominated by the spirit of play.¹²²

Question: _____

- Incomplete sentence: _____
-

¹²¹ Ibid., 99.

¹²² Ibid., 100.

Answer: _____

Developmental question being addressed: _____

9. The law can prompt us to sin. I am told that several years ago a high-rise hotel was built in Galveston, Texas, overlooking the Gulf of Mexico. In fact, they sank pilings into the gulf and built the structure out over the water. When the hotel was about to have its grand opening, someone thought, "What if people decide to fish out the hotel windows?" So they placed signs in the hotel rooms, "No fishing out the hotel windows." Many people ignored the signs, however, and it created a difficult problem. Lines got snarled. People in the dining room saw fish flapping against the windows. The manager of the hotel solved it all by taking down those little signs. No one checks into a hotel room thinking about fishing out the windows. The law, although well-intentioned, created the problem.¹²³

Question: _____

- Incomplete sentence: _____

Answer: _____

Developmental question being addressed: _____

¹²³ Ibid.

Developmental Questions Exercises – Answers

1. Question: Why don't older people learn?

- Older people don't learn because...

Answer: They feel they already know and are too concerned with other matters

Developmental question being addressed: Is it true? (validity)

2. Question: How should you listen to the Word of God?

- You should listen to the Word of God both...

Answer: Carefully and obediently.

Developmental question being addressed: So what? What difference does it make? (application)

3. Question: How can you help your golf game in the winter?

- You can help your golf game in the winter by...

Answer: By practicing before a full-length mirror.

Developmental question being addressed: Is it true? (validity)

4. Question: Why should we love one another?

- We should love one another because...

Answer: Love fulfills all the demands of the law.

Developmental question being addressed: So what? What difference does it make? (implication)

5. Question: How do we learn about reality?

- We learn about reality...

Answer: By repeated, unconscious experience.

Developmental question being addressed: What does it mean? (explanation)

6. Question: What is the importance of memory in music?

- The importance of memory in music is that...

Answer: Without it we would have no melody.

Developmental question being addressed: What does it mean? (explanation)

7. Question: How should I live because I only live once?

- Because we only live once, we should...

Answer: Do good to others now.

Developmental question being addressed: So what? What difference does it make? (implication)

8. Question: How have play and work lost their traditional distinctions?

- Play and work have lost their traditional distinctions in that...

Answer: What was play has been made into work, and what was work is now recreation.

Developmental question being addressed: What does it mean? (explanation)

9. Question: What is a result of having the law?

- The result of having the law is...

Answer: It prompts us to sin.

Developmental question being addressed: Is it true? (validity)

- II. Outlining helps to articulate the emphasis of an author or speaker, which in turn aides in both understanding and communication.
- A. When we understand how the author put the text together, it helps us to make sure we emphasize those things he deemed as most important.
 - B. The author's flow of thought must become clear in our minds, before we can hope to say what God has said.
 - C. Resources for Outlining.
 - 1. Consult an expository commentary for the whole Bible for help in understanding the movements in a passage [e.g., John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, Editors, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary OT & NT* (Victor Books, 1988)].
 - 2. Consult an expository commentary for a single book of the Bible that gives exegetical outlines of each section [e.g., Allen P. Ross, *Creation & Blessing: A Guide to the Study of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988)].
 - D. Professor Don Sunukjian provides a number of helpful reminders while outlining:
 - 1. An effective outline deals with *ideas*, not phrases or fragments or questions.¹²⁴ Therefore complete sentence outlines!
 - 2. While the choice of symbols is arbitrary, custom has established the following general use. Arabic numerals and small letters are used in the "Introduction" and "Conclusion"; Roman numerals and capital letters are reserved for the "Body" of the message.¹²⁵ Transitions are put in parentheses. Transitions are necessary for oral clarity and are useful between major and minor movements in the sermon. (See figure 1 – Sample Outline on page 144)
 - 3. Each point in the outline (including illustrations), should be a *grammatically complete sentence*.¹²⁶
 - 4. Each point should be a declarative or imperative sentence, not a question. A "question" is not an "idea"; it is a transition to an idea.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Don Sunukjian, ("Expository Preaching" class notes, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, MA, D.Min. Class, May 19, 2003), 15.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 14.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

- III. Two exercises on seeing authorial emphasis by structuring a text.
- A. Instructions for exercise number 1: *This example on the next page is to be completed with the entire group participating with the facilitator.*
 - B. Instructions for exercise number two: This exercise is to be done in dyads and triads. It is designed to build confidence on an easy text. The study notes below will be provided. The facilitator will help the participants to become familiar with this skill by wandering around and making sure the groups are progressing.

Seeing Authorial Emphasis by Structuring a Text Exercise #1

Sample sentence...

“Paul went hiking to the top peak at Mt. Washington on his vacation because his soul craves adventure.”

This sentence can be divided into two parts, for there is one major grammatical cue: *because*.

- I. Paul went hiking
- II. The reason (*because*): his soul craves adventure

There are also some smaller grammatical cues: *to*, *at* and *on*. These all relate to the first part of the sentence.

- I. Paul went hiking
 - A. Paul went hiking *to* the top peak
 - B. Paul went hiking *at* Mt. Washington
 - C. Paul went hiking *on* his vacation
- II. The reason Paul went hiking was *because* his soul craves adventure

Since there are no major structural markers in the second part of the sentence, there are no second or third levels under II.

Seeing Authorial Emphasis by Structuring a Text Exercise #2

Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel (^{ESV} Ezra 7:10).

Ezra set his heart:

I. *to study* the law of the LORD

and

II. *to do* it

and

III. *to teach*

A. his statutes

and

B. rules in Israel

Passage Outline

I. Ezra set his heart **to study** the law of the LORD (v. 10a)

II. Ezra set his heart **to do** the law (v. 10b)

III. Ezra set his heart **to teach** the law in Israel (v. 10c)

A. He would teach the LORD's statutes

B. He would teach the LORD's rules

Possible Sermon Outline prepared for a Sunday School Teacher Training Seminar.
Notice that the outline is turned into today's language for a particular audience.

I. Sunday School teachers should set their hearts **to study** the law of the LORD (v. 10a)

II. Sunday School teachers should set their hearts **to do** the law (v. 10b)

III. Sunday School teachers should set their hearts **to teach** the law in the church (v. 10c)

A. We should teach the LORD's statutes

B. We should teach the LORD's rules

(The example from Ezra exposed you to a skill that is helpful in making a biblical message relevant to an audience. Now we will look at the importance of transitions for oral clarity.)

IV. Transitions and oral clarity.

A. Transitions are necessary because they...

1. ... serve as road signs to point out where the sermon has been and where it is going.¹²⁸
2. ... insure that the preacher arrives at the next point *with* the audience, *rather* than getting there all alone.
3. ... guarantee unity, order, and progress.¹²⁹
4. ... keep the logical development smooth and natural for the listener.

B. It might be helpful to distinguish between *Major* and *Minor* Transitions.¹³⁰

1. *Major transitions* will appear between the introduction and the first major point, and then between the major points within a sermon, and between the body of the sermon and the conclusion.
2. *Minor Transitions* can link sub-points together with a single word (e.g., therefore, besides, yet, consequently) or a short phrase (in addition to that, what is more, as a result of this), or with a whole sentence or two.

C. See the next page for an example of the use of transitions in a sermon.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 187.

¹²⁹ Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons*, 111.

¹³⁰ Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 187.

1 Thessalonians 1:2-10 Sermon Outline – Examples of Major and Minor Transitions

Introduction

1. Do you ever get discouraged in ministry?
2. Did you know there was a time in the Apostle Paul's ministry when he was very discouraged?
3. But he overcame his discouragement and so can you.
4. Turn with me to 1 Thessalonians 1:2-10.

(Major Transition: What is God's remedy for a discouraged soul?)

- I. God's remedy is to show us what He has done for other believers (vv. 2-4).

A. Paul was thankful for what God had done for the Thessalonians.

(Minor Transition: Paul was thankful for what God was doing *then*, we can be thankful for what God is doing *now*!)

B. [We can be thankful for what God is doing in our church body].

1. Thank God that His grace is transforming lives all around us.

a. example 1

b. example 2

2. Thank God that He has chosen us in Christ Jesus!

(Major Transition: Paul tells us that we can be encouraged is because of what God has done for us in Christ Jesus. But that is not the only reason we can be encourage. What is the second part of God's remedy for a discouraged soul?)

- II. God's remedy is to show us what He is doing through other believers.

A. Paul had two big reasons He knew God had chosen the Thessalonians.

1. The manner in which the gospel was delivered (v. 5).

a. The gospel was delivered with power, with the Holy Spirit.

- b. The gospel was delivered with deep conviction.
- 2. The manner in which the gospel was received (vv. 6-10).
 - a. The Thessalonians became *imitators* (v. 6).

(Minor Transition: Not only did they become imitators, but they also became models.)

- b. The Thessalonians became a *model* to others (v. 7).

(Minor Transition: The Thessalonians became imitators and models, but what impact did this have on the communities around them?)

- c. The Thessalonians became a gospel megaphone (vv. 8-10).
- B. Praise God for how the gospel was delivered to us and how it has been received.
 - 1. God's gospel came with power and deep conviction.
 - a. Example 1
 - b. Example 2
 - c. Example 3
 - 2. God has been on the move in our church.
 - a. Example 1
 - b. Example 2
 - c. Example 3

(Major Transition: Today God has shown us that we should regularly thank Him for the Christians we know because of what God has done for them and is doing through them.)

Conclusion

SEMINAR – DELIVER THE IDEA – Part Three of Three

DELIVER THE IDEA: Learn how to implement a few key steps to *communicate* the logically-developed biblical idea to a target audience.

PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES: As a result of attending this seminar each participant should be able to:

1. Explain Robinson's definition of expository preaching and show its relevance to the preaching task.
2. Articulate the essence of expository preaching.
3. Properly exegete an audience – *To thine own audience be relevant!*
4. Understand the basics for:
 - a. *Illustrating* an idea so that it achieves its intended purpose.
 - b. *Introducing* an idea in a manner that commands attention and generates interest.
 - c. *Concluding* an idea in a manner that brings closure.
 - d. *Delivery* techniques that bring energy, focus, and interest to the idea being presented.
5. Make three core commitments that will strengthen your effectiveness as a biblical communicator.

LESSON PLAN:

- I. The definition and essence of expository preaching.
 - A. Haddon Robinson gives the following cogent and precise definition:
“Expository preaching is the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and the experience of the preacher, then through the preacher applies to the hearer.”¹³¹

¹³¹ Ibid., 21.

1. Exercise – explain in your own words the relevance of each of the five components of Dr. Robinson’s definition.

a. The passage governs the sermon – _____

b. The expositor communicates a concept – _____

c. The concept comes from the text – _____

d. The concept is applied to the expositor – _____

e. The concept is applied to the hearers – _____

B. Therefore we can say that the essence of expository preaching is...

- presenting the true and exact meaning of the biblical author
- in a manner that is relevant to the contemporary listener

C. In Dr. John Stott’s great book, “Between Two Worlds,” he gives the picture—as the title suggest—of preaching bridging two worlds. An expository preacher must have one foot planted firmly in the biblical world, but that is not enough. An expository preacher must have the other foot planted firmly in the contemporary world. Thus the picture of the preacher bridging the biblical world and the contemporary world.

1. If preachers have both feet planted in the ancient world of the Bible, then although the message is scriptural, it nonetheless doesn't transmit its life changing power to the modern audience. The sermon becomes nothing more than a dry and dusty history lesson.
2. But there is an equal and opposite error that preachers can make, specifically it is living with both feet in the contemporary world. Here we might spend more time in the newspaper, magazines, and internet rather than doing the hard work of biblical exegesis. This preaching might be very entertaining but it lacks the biblical authority precisely because the preacher is not saying "thus saith the Lord."
3. Fortunately there is a third option. This is the option that Dr. Stott recommends, namely living with one foot in the biblical world and the other foot in the contemporary world. Here the message both emerges from Scripture and is relevant to our twenty-first century audience.

(In dyads and triads take a few minutes to evaluate the outlines on the next page to determine if they would qualify as expository sermons. Be prepared to explain your answers.)

Applying Robinson's Definition Exercises – Handout

Determine if the following outlines would qualify as expository sermons by using Robinson's definition of expository preaching.

1. Psalm 150

Praise the Lord.

Praise God in his sanctuary.

*Let everything that has breath
praise the Lord.*

- I. The re-discovery of praise will come with the wholeness of our belief.
- II. The re-discovery of praise will come when we relearn the meaning of worship.
- III. The re-discovery of praise goes hand-in-hand with service.

2. John 13:30

And it was night.

Intro: Night is usually a time of fear, but God has much to say about night.

- I. It can be a time of adversity and affliction (Isa. 21:12).
- II. It can be a time of death (John 9:4).
- III. It can be a time of concern (John 3:1).
- IV. It can be a time of rejection (John 13:30).
- V. It can be a time of rejoicing (Acts 16:25-31).

3. Genesis 25-50

Intro: Jacob is an important character in the Old Testament.

- (1) His birth
- (2) He purchased his birthright
- (3) He deceived his father
- (4) He fled to Haran
- (5) He married and was prosperous
- (6) Finally, he met God

II. Exegete the target audience so that the arrow of the biblical idea hits the bulls-eye.

A. Exegesis is normally a term that describes the process of drawing out the author's intended message to his original audience.

- But good communicators have long known the importance of exegeting the target audience as well as the text.

(How does one go about exegeting a target audience?)

B. There are numerous ways to exegete a target audience. We will explore two helpful avenues to travel:

1. Ask the following questions about your audience:

- What do they believe?
- What do they value?
- What do they need?
- What do they do? or How do they behave? ¹³²

2. Apply the developmental questions to the target audience. The developmental questions (remember the mnemonic device of EPA – Explain, Prove, and Apply) that we earlier applied to the text can now be directed to the target audience.

a. Explain: *What does it mean?*

- Has the biblical writer explained a truth to his original audience that will need to be *explained* to your contemporary target audience? An example of this would be in 1 Corinthians 8 where Paul addresses a big deal to his readers that makes little to no sense to a contemporary audience in the industrialized west today. The preacher of this text will have to exegete the audience and know that “I am going to need to explain what was going on with ‘meat being sacrificed to idols.’” Looking to the modern audience we will have to address the question, “What does this mean?” if we hope to preach this text.

b. Prove: *Is that true? Do I really believe it?*

¹³² Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons*, 181.

- Suppose you were invited to address an interfaith gathering during the Easter season to talk about the core of Christianity. You decide to use 1 Corinthians 15:1-11. As you evaluate your audience you know that there will be profound questions of the validity of the reality of the resurrection: Is it true? Can I really believe it? A good communicator knows that these questions of proof will need to be addressed, rather than just explaining the significance of this event for Christians. Our faith demands that we offer the resurrection as the ultimate proof that “Jesus is Lord.”

c. Apply: *So what? What difference does it make?*

- An audience might understand the biblical concept and they might even know that it is true, but it might be that they are having a difficult time applying the truth to their life. In Ephesians 5:21-33 one will have to spend time no doubt both explaining and proving the biblical concept of “submission.” But after this has been explained and validated, there still remains the task of applying this concept to life. The questions, “So what?” and “What difference does this make?” have to be applied to the audience. The biblical communicator has to be as concrete in the application as in the statement of the problem. So, the preacher will want to give tangible pictures to the husbands in the congregation as to what “loving your wife as Christ loved the church” will look like in their lives. Then, the preacher will want to give concrete pictures to the wife of what “respect” will look like in her marriage. If both husband and wife are to mutually submit to each other, then they are going to need to know what that looks like on Monday morning.

C. The Big Idea is actually a combination of both the exegetical idea and the needs of the audience.¹³³

1. If the needs of the audience are ignored, then the sermon can be thoroughly biblical but still not make an impact on the audience. God’s message is never to be taken merely as historical data! God’s Word is meant to impact and transform our lives in the here and now.
2. Let’s take some time to do an exercise. See the exercise below on the next page. Directions: *Assign dyads and/or triads a specific target group from the list below. Ask them to write down at least five needs that this group*

¹³³ Duane Litfin, *Public Speaking: A Handbook for Christians*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 340.

might have. Then ask them to explain how this group's needs might intersect with the message of Romans 12:17. The point of this exercise is to show that the different needs of the different groups will have a profound impact on the shape a message takes. Audience analysis is not just helpful but it is indispensable for a good biblical communicator. When the groups finish have each group share the fruit of its labor with the other participants.

Exegetical Idea and the Needs of an Audience Exercise

*In groups of two or three: (1) Write down at least five needs that this group might have. (2) Explain how these needs intersect with the message of Romans 12:17 “**Do not repay anyone evil for evil.**”*

1. Preschoolers

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.

2. Teenagers

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.

3. Church Sponsored Men's Sports Team

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.

4. Alcoholics Anonymous Recovery Group

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.

5. Women's Group for those who have been Sexually Abused

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.

III. Illustrating in a sermon.

A. Why illustrate?

- Illustrations help to bring a sermon down to where our audience lives their lives.¹³⁴
- “Illustrations are used to add light, not length. They make the material understandable, but they should not be the focal point of your sermon. Illustrations are not used to entertain (though they may carry some entertainment value); they are to help the audience understand the content or the claims of what is being illustrated.”¹³⁵

B. How should one illustrate?

1. Be as specific as possible. Paint a picture so people can see exactly what you mean.
2. Illustrations should illustrate the point you are trying to make. An illustration just for the sake of entertainment is always detrimental to powerful communication.
3. Illustrations should be understandable. Don't use illustrations that you have to explain (e.g., examples taken from the Bible sometimes violate this rule).
4. The best illustrations appeal not only to people's minds but also to their emotions.
5. Illustrations should be convincing. Make sure that the illustration is factually accurate. Illustrations that cause one to lose credibility aren't worth using.
6. Illustrations should be appropriate to the audience and context.
7. Tell your illustrations with energy and enthusiasm.
8. Personal illustrations:
 - a. Should always be true.

¹³⁴ Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 152.

¹³⁵ Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons*, 121.

- b. Should always be modest. If you have to choose between being the goat and the hero of an illustration, always choose the goat! But most of the time it is better to be humble over against being either a hero or a loser.
- c. Should never violate a confidence. If people feel that their personal lives might become future sermon fodder, then they won't open up about what is going on in their lives. As a general rule, it is best to seek permission on sharing anything (even if you deem it positive) from the pulpit.

C. Where should illustrations be used?

1. The first place to use illustrations is: "All the bare and boring regions of your sermon need illustrations."¹³⁶ Dr. Richard goes on to identify three regions that always need illustrations:
 - the introduction, as you get the attention of your audience and raise the need
 - each major point—I often attempt to insert mini-illustrations at the sublevel of points as well
 - the conclusion, as you bring the sermon to a close
2. One way to identify areas in the body of your sermon that need illustrations is to think through your movements and to run them through the grid of the three developmental questions: *What does it mean? Is it true? So what?* These questions can help to identify those places in the sermon that demand clarity to help the audience *understand, believe, or apply* the truth that is being presented.

D. Illustrations of illustration.

1. If you wanted to illustrate the immutability of Jesus Christ from Hebrews 13:8, then you might use the following illustration:
 - When Lloyd C. Douglas, author of *The Robe* and other novels, was a university student, he lived in a boarding house. Downstairs on the first floor was an elderly, retired music teacher, he was sick and unable to leave the apartment. Douglas said that every morning they had a ritual they would go through together. He would come down the steps, open the old man's door, and ask, "Well, what's the good news?" The

¹³⁶ Ibid., 125.

old man would pick up his tuning fork, tap it on the side of his wheelchair and say, That's middle C! It was middle C yesterday; it will be middle C tomorrow; it will be middle C a thousand years from now. The tenor upstairs sings flat, the piano across the hall is out of tune, but, my friend, THAT is middle C!"

The old man had discovered one thing upon which he could depend, one constant reality in his life, one "still point in a turning world." For Christians, the one "still point in a turning world," the one absolute of which there is no shadow of turning, is Jesus Christ.¹³⁷

2. Bishop Massillon illustrates one who refused to yield to the arrogance of man out of his conviction that God refuses to share his glory (Isaiah 42:8):
 - In 1717, King Louis XIV of France died. Preferring to be called "Louis the Great," he was the monarch who declared, "I am the State!" His court was the most magnificent in Europe, and his funeral was the most spectacular. In the church where the ceremony was performed, his body lay in a golden coffin. To dramatize his greatness, orders had been given that the cathedral would be very dimly lit with only one special candle that was to be set above the coffin. The thousands of people in attendance waited in silence. Then Bishop Massillon began to speak. Slowly reaching down, he snuffed out the candle and said, "Only God is great."¹³⁸
3. When communicating the extent of Christ's love for humanity (from passages like John 3:16, Philippians 2:8, 1 Peter 3:18), one might enlist the playlet *The Long Silence* to illustrate the point:

At the end of time, billions of people were scattered on a great plain before God's throne.

Most shrank back from the brilliant light before them. But some groups near the front talked heatedly - not with cringing shame, but with belligerence.

'Can God judge us? How can he know about suffering?' snapped a pert young brunette. She ripped open a sleeve to reveal a tattooed number from a Nazi concentration camp. 'We endured terror...beatings...torture...death!'

In another group a Negro boy lowered his collar. 'What about this?' he demanded, showing an ugly rope burn. 'Lynched... for no crime but being black!'

¹³⁷ Source unknown, *Bible.org*; available from http://www.bible.org/illus.php?topic_id=785; Internet (updated February 23, 2007; accessed February 23, 2007).

¹³⁸ Jeff Arthurs, *Laying the Foundation for Peace*, available from http://preachingtoday.com/Illustrations/article_print.html?id=35339; Internet (updated February 23, 2007; accessed February 23, 2007).

In another crowd, a pregnant schoolgirl with sullen eyes, ‘Why should I suffer’ she murmured, ‘It wasn’t my fault.’

Far out across the plain there were hundreds of such groups. Each had a complaint against God for the evil and suffering he permitted in his world. How lucky God was to live in heaven where all was sweetness and light, where there was no weeping or fear, no hunger or hatred. What did God know of all that man had been forced to endure in this world? For God leads a pretty sheltered life, they said.

So each of these groups sent forth their leader, chosen because he had suffered the most. A Jew, a Negro, a person from Hiroshima, a horribly deformed arthritic, a thalidomide child. In the center of the plain they consulted with each other. At last they were ready to present their case. It was rather clever.

Before God could be qualified to be their judge, he must endure what they had endured. Their decision was that God should be sentenced to live on earth - as a man!

‘Let him be born a Jew. Let the legitimacy of his birth be doubted. Give him work so difficult that even his family will think him out of his mind when he tries to do it. Let him be betrayed by his closest friends. Let him face false charges, be tried by a prejudice jury and convicted by cowardly judge. Let him be tortured.

‘At the last, let him see what it means to be terribly alone. Then let him die. Let him die so there can be no doubt that he died. Let there be a great host of witnesses to verify it.’

As each leader announced his portion of the sentence, loud murmurs of approval went up from the throng of people assembled.

And when the last had finished pronouncing sentence, there was a long silence. No-one uttered another word. No-one moved. For suddenly all knew that God had already served his sentence.¹³⁹

4. To illustrate the devotion that comes from comprehending what Christ has done to set us free, one could use:

Richard Fairbanks was a minister from the North during the days of slavery in the United States. He decided to spend some of his vacation time visiting an actual slave auction in the South. The place was a dirty, dilapidated old barn. There were many people there, especially men seeking to buy humans as slaves. A beautiful mulatto girl was brought to the auction block. Fairbanks heard the crude men say what they would do with her if they owned her. The bidding began and continued. The auctioneer was just about to say “sold” when the minister began bidding. Eventually he bought the girl. He elbowed his way to the front and reached out his hand toward her to help her down. When he did, she spit in

¹³⁹ John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1986), 336-337.

his face. He heard her say, “I don’t know who you are, but if I ever get a chance, I’ll kill you.” When the two got to the back of the building, Fairbanks turned to the girl and said, “Where I come from we don’t have slaves.” And with that he handed her her freedom papers. At first she couldn’t believe it. But when the truth finally gripped her, she turned to him and said, “Master, my master! I’ll serve you as long as I live.”¹⁴⁰

5. To illustrate the dangers of wealth, Robinson uses the following illustration:

For every verse in the Bible that tells us the benefits of wealth, there are ten that tell us the danger of wealth, for money has a way of binding us to what is physical and temporal, and blinding us to what is spiritual and eternal. It’s a bit like the fly and the flypaper. The fly lands on the flypaper and says, “My flypaper.” When the flypaper says, “My fly,” the fly is dead. It is one thing to have money, another for money to have you. When it does, it will kill you.¹⁴¹

To steal a phrase from Robinson, illustrating is one way of “making dry bones live.”¹⁴²

(“There are three types of preachers: those to whom you cannot listen; those to whom you can listen; and those to whom you must listen.”¹⁴³ Applying the principles in this section can help one to take strides towards being that third type of speaker. But there are two other areas that hold disproportionate significance in relation to their overall length: introductions and conclusions. Let’s take a look at introductions.)

IV. *Introduce* an idea in a manner that commands attention and generates interest.

- A. Introductions introduce you to the audience.
- B. Introductions also introduce your audience to the subject of your sermon idea, to your central idea, or to your first major point (e.g., in an inductive sermon).
- C. Three characteristics of effective introductions:
 1. *An effective introduction commands attention.*¹⁴⁴ If you don’t capture attention in the first thirty seconds, you might not ever get a second chance. In evaluating the effectiveness of how well an introduction

¹⁴⁰ Robert P. Lightner and Bernard Thompson, *James: Apostle of Practical Christianity* (Denver: Accent Books, 1983), 60-61.

¹⁴¹ Haddon Robinson, *A Good Lesson from a Bad Example*, available from <http://preachingtoday.com/30327>; Internet (updated February 23, 2007; accessed February 23, 2007).

¹⁴² Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 139.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 175.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 166.

commands attention, here is a great test... “Based on what you have heard so far... would you like to hear the rest of the sermon?” Robinson gives a number of captivating examples:

- a. “Many children of God live as though they were orphans.”¹⁴⁵ *Would you like to hear the rest of the sermon?*
 - b. “‘Honesty is the best policy.’ When a person says that, he may not be honest at all. He may simply be shrewd.”¹⁴⁶ *Would you like to hear the rest of the sermon?*
 - c. “If it were possible for God to die and He died this morning, how long would it take you to find out?”¹⁴⁷ *Would you like to hear the rest of the sermon?*
 - d. “Mary Watson was a housewife in her late thirties. She thought of herself as young and still attractive even though she had been married fifteen years and was the mother of three children. In the space of a month she developed into an ugly, old woman.”¹⁴⁸ *Would you like to hear the rest of the sermon?*
 - e. “If you claim to be a Christian, you must believe in the Trinity.”¹⁴⁹ *Would you like to hear the rest of the sermon?*
2. *An effective introduction uncovers needs.*¹⁵⁰ The best sermons are those that the audience can’t help but listen to. This happens when the introduction surfaces a personally felt need. There is a direct relationship with how attentively a person listens with how intensely the need that is presented is felt.
- Imagine how many of the women in a congregation would listen if in the introduction the preacher stated: “Can a woman who works be a good mother? What do you say? What does the Bible say?”
 - Haddon Robinson emphasizes the importance of surfacing felt needs in the following paragraph: “Sermons catch fire when flint strikes steel. When the flint of a person’s problem strikes the steel of the Word of God, a spark ignites that burns in the mind. Directing our

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 167.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 168.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

preaching at needs is not merely a persuasive technique; it is the task of the ministry.”¹⁵¹

- He also wisely reminds us that, “Christians differ from non-Christians not in their needs but in the ways their needs are met.”¹⁵²
 - And finally, he wants to screw this thought in the mind of the biblical communicator: “The more basic the need, the stronger the interest.”¹⁵³
 - Don’t wait until the end of the sermon to start applying the text, rather application should be initiated in the introduction. People should have a sense of why listening to this sermon matters to them personally.
3. *An effective introduction introduces the body of the sermon.*¹⁵⁴ The audience needs to be oriented with the direction the preacher is about to take. Powerful introductions focus the audience on the body of the sermon and its developments.

(Robinson challenges preachers to “Start with a bang and quit all over.”¹⁵⁵ If we apply the principles of effective introductions we will start with a bang, now let’s learn how to quit all over.)

V. *Conclude* an idea in a manner that brings closure.

A. Qualities of an effective conclusion:

1. Effective conclusions are prepared thoughtfully/deliberately.
2. Effective conclusions end *on* and *with* purpose—they don’t just stop.
3. Effective conclusions end with a burning focus on the big idea.
4. Effective conclusions answer the question, directly or indirectly, “So what? What difference does this make?”
5. Effective conclusions always insist on an alteration in *how* people live their lives in light of encountering God in his Word.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 170.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 171.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 165. This is Robinson’s chapter on preparing introductions and conclusions.

6. Effective conclusions aren't predictable. Variety is the spice of life and it adds zest to conclusions and keeps them from being too monotonous and pedestrian.

B. Ways to conclude a sermon:

1. *A Summary* – ties loose ends together without re-preaching the sermon.

- Robinson begins his conclusion of Luke 11:1-4 with a summary of the main movements in the sermon:

When you talk to the Father about the Father, talk to him about his program and his person. When you talk to him about the family, talk to him about provision, pardon, and protection. When you pray say, "Father."¹⁵⁶

2. *An Illustration* – summarizes the big idea with an anecdote.

- Robinson concludes a sermon about coveting based on Luke 12:16-34 with the following illustration to drive home his main point:

There's a legend of a man who had a rather stupid servant. The master often got exasperated with his servant, and one day in a fit of frustration he said to the servant, "You've got to be the stupidest man I've ever met. Look, I want you to take this staff and carry it with you. And if you ever meet a man stupider than you are, give him the staff." So the servant carried the staff, and often out in the marketplace he'd meet some pretty stupid people. But he was never sure they were worse off than he. Years passed with the servant carrying his staff, and then one day, he came back to the castle and was ushered into the bedroom of his master. Master was quite sick.

In the course of their conversation, the master said, "I'm going on a long journey." The servant said, "When do you plan to be back?" The master said, "This is a journey from which I'll not return." The servant said, "Sir, have you made all the necessary preparations?" The master said, "No, I've not." The servant said, "Could you have made preparations?" The master said, "Yes, I guess I've had my life to make them, but I've been busy about other things." The servant said, "Master, you're going on a journey from which you'll never return, you could have prepared for it, and you just didn't?" The master said, "Yes, I guess that's right." The servant took the staff he'd carried so

¹⁵⁶ Haddon Robinson, *The Disciple's Prayer*, available from <http://preachingtoday.com/30455>; Internet (updated February 23, 2007; accessed February 23, 2007).

long and said, “Master, take this with you. At last I’ve met a man more stupid than myself.”

Beware of covetousness. A man’s life does not consist of the things he possesses. It consists of seeking, at the center of your life, God’s kingdom, God’s rule. And when you do that, all these other things, unnecessary as they are, will be added unto you. Do you believe that? Then why don’t you do it?¹⁵⁷

- Robinson shows how Peter Marshall ends a sermon on James 4:14 with a riveting story:

An old legend tells of a merchant in Bagdad who one day sent his servant to the market. Before very long the servant came back, white and trembling, and in great agitation said to his master: “Down in the market place I was jostled by a woman in the crowd, and when I turned I saw it was Death that jostled me. She looked at me and made a threatening gesture. Master, please lend me your horse, for I must hasten away to avoid her. I will ride to Samarra and there I will hide, and Death will not find me.”

The merchant lent him his horse and the servant galloped away in great haste. Later the merchant went down to the market place and saw Death standing in the crowd. He went over to her and asked, “Why did you frighten my servant this morning? Why did you make a threatening gesture?”

“That was not a threatening gesture,” Death said. “It was only a start of surprise. I was astonished to see him in Bagdad, for I have an appointment with him tonight in Samarra.”

Each of us has appointment in Samarra. But that is cause for rejoicing—not fear, provided we have put our trust in Him who alone holds the keys of life and death.¹⁵⁸

3. *A Quotation* – used when someone else’s words are better than your own or when they add needed authority. Should be short and memorized.

- One might close a sermon on the first two beatitudes from Matthew 5:3-4 by quoting Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase *The Message*:

“You’re blessed when you’re at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.”

¹⁵⁷ Haddon Robinson, *A Good Lesson from a Bad Example*, available from <http://preachingtoday.com/30327>; Internet (updated February 23, 2007; accessed February 23, 2007).

¹⁵⁸ Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2001), 177, quoting Peter Marshall, *John Doe, Disciple: Sermons for the Young in Spirit*, ed. Catherine Marshall (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963), 219-220.

“You’re blessed when you feel you’ve lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you.”¹⁵⁹

4. *A Question* – A challenging question can be an effective conclusion to a sermon.

- Robinson shows how a sermon on the Good Samaritan ended:

“Let me conclude where I began. Do you love God? That’s splendid. I am glad to hear that. A second question: Do you love your neighbor? How can we talk about loving God who we have not seen if we do not love our brothers and sisters and our neighbors whom we do see? If you love your neighbors, do you mind if I ask them?”¹⁶⁰

5. *A Prayer* – can be effective when used as a genuine plea and not a tool to summarize the sermon or to challenge the audience indirectly.

- For example, at the end of a sermon on the publican and Pharisee, the preacher, without calling the people to pray, cried, “O God, be merciful to us, the sinners. Amen.”¹⁶¹

6. *Specific Directions* – More people stumble spiritually out of church not because they can’t understand the question *why* but rather they don’t understand *how* to apply the text to their lives. What difference should this truth make on Monday morning?

- A sermon on 1 Timothy 6:9-10 could conclude by exhorting the congregation to break-off the illegitimate love-relationship with money.

7. *Visualization* – Help the audience to see how this truth might be applied to their life in a possible (or better yet a “probable”) future situation that they here-to-date haven’t experienced.

- A sermon on restoring an erring Christian gently opened with a situation and then concluded with a visualization of how Galatians 6:1-2 might look in that given situation:

Situation that was shared in the introduction: Richard, a high school student, is ready for a hard test at school. He has studied and is well prepared. He is about to go back over her test one last time, because

¹⁵⁹ Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message: New Testament with Psalms and Proverbs* (Colorado Springs: NavPress Publishing Group, 1995), 20.

¹⁶⁰ Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 178.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 178.

there are two problems that he can't figure out. Then he looks to his right and he notices the smartest person in the class, Rachel is working on the exam... and without even trying he can see the answers to the questions he has been struggling with. He looks away, but then finds himself glancing back over and changing his answers to what Rachel has down. He walks out of class and feels awful. His friends ask him what is wrong at lunch and he says nothing and walks away. That night at Bible study he can't take it any more and he owns up to his youth pastor and his friends that he cheated on his test. He had even studied, but when he glanced over and saw the answers he couldn't figure out... it was like something made him look over there again. What should the Youth Pastor and Richard's friends do now that he has confessed this sin?

Visualization of what Galatians 6:1-2 might look like in the conclusion: His youth pastor tells him how proud he is of him. He lets him know that the reason he felt awful after cheating was because God rules in his heart. Richard doesn't know what he should do, so they pray and a couple of the kids in the group tell Richard they will go with him if he wants to tell the teacher that he looked at someone else's paper to get two answers. Richard is scared but with the support of his Christian friends he knows that he can do it. Richard's Youth Pastor and his friends restore him very gently.

VI. Where to from here?

As a result of completing these three seminars I would like to encourage you to make three commitments:

- A. Commit to the philosophy of expository preaching. As a result of going through this intensive process, it is my hope that you will commit yourself to the philosophy of expository preaching. This will demand more of you, but the benefits of saying what God has said far outweigh any of the costs.
- B. Commit to preaching an expository sermon. Now that you have a new set of wings... it's time to fly! Some of you will preach on Sunday mornings others will find an opportunity in other contexts. I would like to walk through this process with you and I will commit both time and energy to see you succeed in saying what God has said. I suggest that we plan on meeting as you progress towards delivering an expository sermon. If you are ready I can schedule the initial meeting today, then after that we can schedule the subsequent meetings. By the time you have discovered, developed, and prepared to deliver the biblical idea; you will be more than adequately equipped to deliver an effective sermon.

1. Initial meeting (pick a passage and set a course of study).
 2. Discover the idea... then set up meeting with your pastor.
 3. Develop the idea... then set up meeting with your pastor.
 4. Prepare to Deliver an idea... then set up a meeting with your pastor.
 5. Preach the sermon.
 6. Review and feedback – Set up a meeting with your pastor.
- C. Commit to deepening your understanding of expository preaching to strengthen your expository skills. You will want to start deepening your understanding of expository preaching by reading some of the best material that is out there. Here are a few recommendations to start you on your journey.
1. *First tier post-seminar resources* — Two texts that will help you to continue on your journey to becoming a more faithful and more powerful Christian communicator are:
 - Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, second edition (Baker, 2001).
 - John R.W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds* (Eerdmans, 1982).
 2. *Second tier post-seminar reading* – The following are helpful resources to add to your preaching library.
 - Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching* (Baker, 1994).
 - Ramesh Richards, *Preparing Expository Sermons* (Baker, 2001).
 - Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson, *The Art & Craft of Biblical Preaching* (Zondervan, 2005).
 - Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 3rd Edition (Zondervan, 2003).
 - Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book* (Zondervan, 2002).

CHAPTER FIVE

RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The goal of this project is to equip lay leaders to preach expository sermons more effectively by taking them through three seminars. The preaching event for this project has been conceived of in broad terms rather than narrow terms. It might occur in the normal context of a Sunday morning message delivered in a sanctuary filled with congregants. However, it might just as likely occur at a men's or women's retreat, a Sunday School class, a small group Bible study, a youth group meeting, an outreach program, a children's ministry. When lay people are effectively trained to discover, develop, and deliver a scripturally sound and practically relevant message based on the biblical author's big idea, then the potential for life-transforming ministry increases exponentially. God's Spirit works through God's proclaimed Word to alter lives to His glory.

These three seminars have been designed to walk the participants through the discovery of a biblical idea, the development of a biblical idea, and the delivery of a biblical idea. Little to no prior formal theological or homiletical training was assumed. The seminars start at ground zero and build from there.

In this chapter three topics will be address. First, the impact of this thesis-project on the author will be considered. Second, examination of the results that were harvested from the test group that went through an abbreviated version of the first seminar (*Discover the Idea*) will be explored. Third, the recommendations that are the outgrowth

of the lessons learned from the test group will be addressed with an eye to increasing the effectiveness of these seminars for future facilitators.

BENEFITS OF THE THESIS-PROJECT PROCESS ON THE AUTHOR

As I reflect upon the process of writing this thesis-project, I have experienced benefits in a number of areas. Some of the benefits stand out with particular vividness. First, constructing these seminars gave me *a deeper understanding* of the philosophy and practice of preparing and delivering expository sermons. It always seems to be the case, that when one is required to teach something it inevitably ends up sharpening the understanding of the one presenting the material. Putting one's thoughts down on paper has a way of forcing one to think clearly through what one is communicating. So, the net benefit to my understanding of expository preaching has been greatly increased through the process of writing this paper and crafting these seminars.

Another benefit involves *a renewed conviction* that expository preaching that is both *biblical* and *relevant* must say what God has said. Prior to engaging this process, this was a conviction, but the more I read and studied and prepared—the more my conviction increased and deepened to this way of thinking about preaching. Expository preaching is not one of the options on the smorgasbord of homiletical approaches, but sum and substance of what all true biblical preaching should be. If we are not saying what God has said, then it is little wonder that lives are not being impacted with the supernatural power of forgiveness and freedom that Christ alone provides.

A third benefit that I have experienced in this process is *a greater confidence* in standing in the pulpit before an audience. Why should people give a half hour of their

valuable time every week to listening to me talk? Well, if it is only to hear my opinions about a given topic then they shouldn't. But if God is actually talking to them through this preacher who is saying what God has said, then I can stand before them with confidence. The confidence is in the fact that God is not silent, but He is still talking to His people through His proclaimed Word. People are not coming in the ultimate sense to hear a preacher, but to hear God through the preached Word.

Yet another benefit that I have experienced grows out of the third benefit that I just mentioned. When a preacher preaches with confidence in the message that God wants communicated, then the sermon is delivered with *a sense of expectancy*. God's Word is likened to a two-edged sword and his gospel is the dynamite [power] of God. When His Word is faithfully proclaimed the preacher should be expecting lives to be transformed. This transformation is not primarily rooted in the preacher's own ability, but in the power of God's spoken Word. God spoke into the chaos in the beginning and transformation occurred and the wonderful news is that God is still into speaking into chaos today—still converting chaos into beauty. God speaks and things happen: Darkness is transformed into light and nothing is transformed into something. What a different posture a preacher takes in the pulpit when God's Word is proclaimed by someone who knows the nature of God and the power of His Word.

I have also benefited from this project in that *I have learned when I can stop studying and begin developing the message*. This may not seem like a big deal, but early in my ministry I never felt like I had studied enough to start preparing the sermon. There was always more work to do! But now I know that once I have the Big Idea and understand how it fits into the overall structure of the author's idea, that I am ready to

start preparing the sermon. Previously I would study and then leave almost no time for preparation, but now I know that once I have a handle on the Big Idea that I can start developing the sermon. This has made the limited time that I have to study much more productive.

A final benefit of this process is that I have gained *a desire to pass on* some of what I have learned about expository preaching to others. This really emerges from my own experience as a preacher. For years I had been committed to expository preaching, or so I thought. I had been in ministry for 12 years and had been preaching Sunday after Sunday on a regular basis. Wanting to see God transform people by His Word through my preaching in a greater way, I decided to pursue additional training in the area of homiletics. This is why I enrolled in this program at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary that emphasized expository preaching. I know that there are others in ministry (and even lay people) who could benefit from the great teaching that I have received. Although I would not consider myself a great preacher in any sense of the word “great” I do think that I am on the right path. I have a lot to still improve on, but I do believe that I am pointed in the right direction. I sense that others could benefit from all that I have been blessed with through this course of study. I have a desire to pass on what God has given to me.

I benefited in more than just these areas, but these are the ones that stand out most vividly in my mind. The learning process has continued throughout this entire thesis-project. I was blessed by writing the thesis and by crafting these three seminars, but one of the areas that helped me in a very tangible way was by receiving feed back from a test group.

RESULTS HARVESTED FROM TEST GROUP EXPERIENCE

This test group was assembled to gauge the effectiveness of the seminars; they participated in a portion of the first seminar (i.e., Discover the Idea). I intentionally chose people from very diverse backgrounds and experience in my church setting. This sampling of dissimilar individuals provided a test case that would demonstrate how effectively the concepts were communicated. If this diverse group could gain the needed understanding of how to discover the big idea from a text, then a more select group should have no problem in following the material.

Nine participants gathered for a night of “testing” this material. The theoretical aspects were presented first, and then the seminar focused on hands-on opportunities to work with the group on discovering the big idea from an assortment of texts. I then asked the participants to digest what occurred that night and to email me the answers to six questions. The six questions were: (1) What general feedback on the seminar comes to mind? (2) Is there more involved in preparing to communicate biblical truth than you thought? (3) Why would mastering this ‘Big Idea’ skill be essential to biblical communication? (4) Did you get lost in the theoretical explanation of ‘discovering the Big Idea’? If yes, where? (5) Did the exercises help to clarify the process? (6) Any suggestions for future communication of this material?

The questions were designed to give the instructor a better handle on how effectively the key concepts were communicated. Two of the questions (1 and 6) were very open-ended and were looking for broad responses. One question (2) was designed to see where the students started and where they ended. The third question (3) was designed

so that the students could demonstrate what they synthesized and internalized as a result of reflecting on what happened in the seminar. Questions 4 and 5 tried to address concerns that I thought might arise as a result of teaching this course.

The results are actually grouped under the six questions that were posed to the test group participants. The comments that follow are a sample of the more significant points that emerged from the feedback.

(1) What General Feedback on the Seminar Comes to Mind?

First, the overall feedback was very positive, the participants felt that the seminar was very profitable and enjoyable. It actually generated a lot of excitement, questions and ideas. For example, some of the participants felt that the seminar gave them tools that will help them in their personal study of Scripture. One person even commented: “Finding the big idea through question and answer form was helpful in making ‘expository preaching’ more concrete and doable for me.”

Second, the abbreviated seminar seemed to challenge the people to make sure that they had God’s idea rather than just employing scriptural language to color one’s own opinions. Moreover, the group saw that there was a clear connection between having the original author’s big idea and then demonstrating the relevance of this idea to a contemporary audience. One participant noted: “Kevin, your thesis, I believe is the very essence of preaching. It is communicating with clarity and with force not only what the Bible says, but also what it means, and how it applied and still applies to every man and woman now and forever more.” She clearly understood that preaching that is truly expository must be faithful to the text and must be applicable to everyday life.

Third, many of the participants commented that the quotes from Stott¹⁶² and Robinson¹⁶³ on expository preaching were very helpful in differentiating between Big Idea preaching and other kinds of preaching. These two quotes lay out a clear contrast of who is the master of direction of the sermon: The text or the preacher. If it isn't the text, then it isn't expository preaching! Initially I wasn't sure if I should use such long quotes in a teaching session, but the feedback on these quotes was very strong. The participants noted that these two quotes combined with personal examples of how preachers impose their own ideas on the text proved to be very helpful in understanding the difference that expository preaching should make. This diverse test group was even able to articulate that expository preaching actually protected a congregation by insuring that the message actually emerged from the text rather than from the preacher's theological convictions or imagination.

(2) Is There More Involved in Preparing to Communicate Biblical Truth Than You Thought?

Many of the participants said they knew that there was a lot of hard work involved in the process that begins with study and ends with delivering the sermon. Even those who knew a lot of work was involved shared that the process was very different than they conceived it to be. Some of their comments are instructive:

- “I was aware of the need but was previously puzzled by determining a standardized process. This process is helpful.”
- “I don't know about ‘more’ but certainly a different approach than I thought. If anything, it gave me a deeper respect for what

¹⁶² Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 126-127.

¹⁶³ Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 22.

it takes to prepare to communicate biblical truth. And in some ways, more is involved than I realized. I didn't know hours of preparation to find the 'big idea' was necessary. I didn't know that preachers might look for 'one' biblical idea of the passage and the precision they needed. I figured they took their 'spin' on the passage, as God revealed it to them and as they examined the whole of scripture. It comforts me to know that pastors can be trained in expository preaching because even with studying the bible, knowing some Greek, and reading commentaries, it could be interpretive if a person didn't decide to find one concrete point. It's also exciting that there is an objective truth to each passage."

- "There is more involved in preparing. There is a big difference between knowing and/or reciting Bible verses than understanding the true meaning of those verses."

Many were aware that preparing to communicate a biblical idea was rather involved, but the seminar helped to make "what" actually is involved more concrete.

(3) Why Would Mastering This 'Big Idea' Skill Be Essential to Biblical Communication?

The participants were able to clearly communicate why mastering the skill of discovering the 'Big Idea' was essential to biblical communication. This is what they said in their own words:

- "Helps one to see the author's original intention, which helps one to communicate what it meant and then translate it to how it applies today."
- "Without the Big Idea being clearly understood, it is impossible for the preacher to articulate it in the sermon. Thus the people don't hear what God is saying in the text. Points may be made during a sermon, but if we don't have the big idea crystal clear then the audiences misses God's point."
- "It takes the person out of the equation and forces you to follow what the Bible says."

- “Mastering the ‘Big Idea’ is essential for many reasons: (1) It would help keep us true to God’s Word in our hearts and minds. (2) It would enable us to share God’s Word with others in the way that God would want us to share it. (3) It would help us as followers of Christ to live an obedient life. If our theology and understanding is flawed, so, too will be the way we live out our lives and communicate it with others. As believers, everything we do is to be done with excellence. ... In summary, our Biblical communication with ourselves and others would be true and most effective to and for the sake of God’s Word if we master the ‘Big Idea’ skill.”
- “It is clear that if one does not understand what one is talking about, something less than desirable will come out from those talks – confusion, misunderstanding, and/or totally false understandings. In every area, and Biblical understanding is a major area, we must know what we are talking about if we are to help our ‘neighbor’ understand that topic.”

Mastering the ‘Big Idea’ helps us to stay true to the original intent of the text. It insures that we communicate God’s ideas and not our opinions. It forces us to rely on the text for the substance of our sermon. It reminds us that orthopraxy emerges from orthodoxy—if our theology is flawed it will negatively impact both our experience and behavior. Or to put it another way, bad theology hurts people. Mastering the ‘Big Idea’ helps the biblical communicator to know what God has said, so we can clearly communicate His ideas to our modern audience.

(4) Did You Get Lost in the Theoretical Explanation of ‘Discovering the Big Idea’? If Yes, Where?

There was some confusion initially on understanding the subject and complement for some of the participants. One of the participants didn’t know if the subject and the complement came from the text or if the subject came from the questions of life and then the complement was the scriptural answer to our life-generated questions. So, there was

some confusion here. But not everyone struggled in the same way. Actually one of the participants seemed to grasp the theory rather quickly:

“I was able to follow along and understand what I consider to have been the main points of the Big Idea: each idea is composed of a subject and a complement. A subject would refer to the question the passage suggests, and the complement would be the answer to the question. I understood the importance of looking at the Bible objectively and seeing what it says by reading the context, rather than fitting the Bible into one’s preconceived notions.”

If comprehension can be measured by the students accurately conveying the concepts into their own words, then the seminar was a success. Many of the participants were able to verbalize during the abbreviated seminar that the “big idea” was the dominant thought that controlled all the subordinate thoughts of the passage. Having a basic understanding of these essential elements in expository preaching has the power to forever change how they approach the biblical text, but the ability to clearly state the big idea of the biblical text is the foundational objective of the seminars.

What became clear was that the style of the seminars worked well for some students but not as well for others. The young lady in the earlier quote above is someone who loves to learn and is an exceptional student. She has a passion for learning and is a very adept student even in lecture formats. But this was not true of everyone in the test group. Many of the students were more hands-on people, but all of the students responded well to the exercises regardless of the style of learning that best suited their personality and temperament.

(5) Did the Exercises Help to Clarify the Process?

The clear indication from all involved was that the exercises were the key to mastering the concepts. The participants were all striking the same note on this subject:

- “The exercises brought everything into focus.”
- “The exercises made a huge difference for me.”
- “The exercises were the most beneficial part for me because we could try it for ourselves.”
- “Yes, very helpful – the large variety of examples opens the mind for multiple contexts and thinking about topics in a new way.”
- “The exercises were extremely helpful. Any theory is best understood when it is put into practice. I was glad that you used secular and Biblical examples. It helped with the understanding of the “Big Idea” skill.”
- “This simplified things for me a bit which was good.”

One person found the exercises so helpful that he suggested trying to figure out a way to introduce them earlier in the process. This suggestion might cause more confusion rather than providing clarity. It is possible that more questions might arise if one were to use this suggested approach rather than laying the theory out initially and then reinforcing it through exercises. Theory then exercises seems like the most economical use of time. But even if introducing exercises earlier in the process isn't recommended one can still see that this suggestion reiterates how helpful the exercises were in putting handles on the concepts for the participants.

(6) Any Suggestions for Future Communication of This Material?

The answers in this section fit most readily into the next section, so they will be incorporated into “Recommendations to Future Facilitators.”

RECOMMENDATIONS TO FUTURE FACILITATORS

The following are eleven recommendations that are an outgrowth of the responses from the test group that participated in the abbreviated seminar where they learned how to discover the idea.

First, it would be beneficial to build question and answer time into the structure of the seminar. This became evident as one person raised the question, “How do we know how much of a chunk of Scripture contains the Big Idea?” Specifically he asked, “How do I really know where to begin and stop in Scripture to get the Big Idea?” His question was not covered in the seminar, but it became evident that some of the items that we leave out for the sake of time might be a pressing question for some of the participants. So, it is recommended that adequate time be given to the questions that the actual participants raise. These might not be issues that the facilitator planned on addressing, but given the make-up of the participants of a particular group it might prove to be beneficial to spend a few minutes answering these types of questions. This demands that the facilitator be adept at answering these kinds of questions, so becoming fluent in the concepts in Haddon Robinson’s *Biblical Preaching* is essential.

Second, make sure there is ample time to cover that material in the seminar. There were a few participants who indicated that: “The seminar seemed rushed.” There was

more material than the allotted time could handle. Recommendation: It could be helpful to break the seminars down into further sub-seminars to give the necessary time to teaching and experiencing the “Big Idea” concepts. Or, simply incorporate fewer exercises in each area.

Third, it is recommended that real life examples from one’s own experience be used to show the participants of the group how easy it is to bend Scripture to one’s own ideas rather letting the Text take dominance. How many times have preachers begun a study with a solid hypothetical direction for a sermon only to find out after studying the text that this isn’t at all what the biblical passage teaches? Articulating some personal experiences with this can help student to see how easy it is to let opinions rule rather than the text. But we need to constantly reinforce the need to let the text be the master of the sermon. The use of real life examples helped to flesh out the difference between exegesis and eisegesis for the participants.

Fourth, remember that people learn differently. It might be beneficial to make the material available before the seminar for those who like to familiarize themselves prior to sitting through a seminar. Another helpful aid might be providing a list of terms and their definitions for quick referral for those who feel lost.

Fifth, most people learn better when they are refreshed. This test course was offered at night after many of the people had been working all day. It might be better to offer the seminars on a Saturday morning after a good night’s sleep.

Sixth, a major way to ensure that people are actually learning what is being taught is to check the pulse of the group frequently. Allow for questions from the group in order to clarify group comprehension. If some of the participants are lost at step one, then

either frustration or additional confusion builds and gains negative momentum. The only practical way to handle this is to anticipate that people are going to have to wrestle with these concepts in order to master them. Because people learn differently and have had different life-experiences, a one-size-fits-all method of teaching will not meet everyone's needs. Therefore, the way to fix this is to allow the process to be truly interactive. This makes the process a little messier, but if the goal is the actual transfer of knowledge and mastery of concepts, then it is worth planning for interactive engagement.

The facilitator of this material must remember that just plowing through the seminars and racing to the finish line was never the chief objective. Take the pulse of the group frequently and then you as the facilitator can see how many of the students are tracking with the concept(s). If it is discovered that some in the group are hanging up on a point, then it is worth taking more time to ensure that everyone is on the same page before turning to the next one.

Seventh, because the participants were unanimous in their appreciation for the hands-on exercises, the recommendation would be to plan on using a lot of time working through these homiletical calisthenics. This is a part of the learning that cannot be rushed. Taking time to flesh out the process through exercises is time well spent.

Eighth, the desire for more exercises reinforces the importance of continuing to review the fundamental concepts of expository preaching as the seminars progress. Repetition, rather than causing the students to become bored with the process, served as a vehicle to build confidence in mastering the necessary concepts of discovering, developing, and delivering a biblical and relevant message.

Ninth, although these seminars could be taught in a one-on-one setting, a small group setting seemed to be a helpful context in which to learn. Some said that it was in listening to the other participants interact that things started to gel mentally. It seems that it was during the group exercises that many of the participants made the necessary cognitive link between theory and practice:

It helped to see what other people thought was the subject of the passage and if that subject stood up to Scripture in its entirety. For example, at first glance, when we looked at Psalm 32:1, my first reaction was that the passage was on forgiveness of sins. But then, when someone said it was about “who is blessed”, that made more sense with the passage. It may have taken me a while to have come up with that on my own. It was also helpful to practice making questions in the form of ‘who, what, how, etc.’ and stating the Big Idea in your own words.

During the class we had great participation and discussion on which interrogative best described what was being said in the text. This provided a great opportunity to encourage the participants that this is what should go on internally in the mind of the biblical communicator as they prepare to say what God has said. The group wrestled vigorously with Psalm 32:1-2 trying to decide on whether this was a “how to—How can a person be blessed of God?” passage or if it was simply a “declarative—Who is the blessed person?” passage like one finds in the beatitudes of Matthew 5. The give and take of the class interaction played out in an illustrative manner showing how a biblical communicator must wrestle with a text to find the author’s intended meaning.

Tenth, handouts to follow along with the theoretical teaching and practical exercises were much appreciated. Having something to engage with visually allowed the participants to digest the material in a deeper way. It was also felt that having something

to take home would allow them to review the concepts and to internalize them more fully.

Recommendation: Use handouts liberally!

Eleventh, the participants grasped how important it is for the communicator to be able to put the sometimes-complex ideas that we find in Scripture into simple language that can be transferred to a broader audience. If the biblical communicator isn't clear on what is being communicated, then the audience is obviously at a distinct disadvantage. Or as Dr. Haddon Robinson says frequently, "a mist in the pulpit is a fog in the pews."

Thinking oneself clear is a fundamental step in the process of effective communication.

Recommendation: Give the students frequent opportunities to rephrase what they are learning with the whole class. This will show the facilitator how well the concepts are being communicated and it also builds confidence in the participants that they are genuinely mastering the key concepts.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adams, Jay E. *Preaching With Purpose* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982).
- Arthurs, Jeff. *Laying the Foundation for Peace*, available from http://preachingtoday.com/illustrations/article_print.html?id=35339; Internet (updated February 23, 2007; accessed February 23, 2007).
- Carson, D. A. *New Testament Commentary Survey*, Fifth Edition (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001).
- Chapell, Bryan. *Christ-Centered Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book, 1994).
- Daley, Robert Malcolm, *Training Laypersons in the Preparation of Biblical Messages*, Doctor of Ministry Thesis, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 1996.
- Duduit, Michael, Editor. *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992).
- Fee, Gordon D. and Douglas Stuart. *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, Third Edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003).
- _____. *How to Read the Bible Book by Book* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002).
- Fee, Gordon D. *New Testament Exegesis*, Revised Edition (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993).
- Galli, Mark and Craig Brian Larson. *Preaching That Connects* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994).
- Greidanus, Sidney. *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999).
- _____. *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988).
- Henderson, David W. *Culture Shift: Communicating God's Truth in Our Changing World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998).
- Litfin, Duane. *Public Speaking, A Handbook for Christians*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992).

- Lloyd-Jones, D. Martyn. *Preaching & Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Co., 1972).
- Long, Thomas G. *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989).
- Longman III, Tremper. *Old Testament Commentary Survey*, Third Edition (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003).
- Mager, Robert F. *Preparing Instructional Objectives: A Critical Tool In the Development of Effective Instruction*, Third Edition (Atlanta: The Center for Effective Performance, Inc., 1997).
- Matthews, Alice P. *Preaching That Speaks to Women* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003).
- Olford, Stephen with David L. Olford. *Anointed Expository Preaching* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers., 1998).
- Packer, J. I. *God Speaks to Man: Revelation and the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965).
- Quicke, Michael J. *360 Degree Preaching: Hearing, Speaking, and Living the Word* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003).
- Raymer, Roger, "Mentoring Pastoral Staff in Homiletics: A Manual for Senior Pastors," Doctor of Ministry Thesis, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 2003.
- Richard, Ramesh. *Preparing Expository Sermons: A Seven-Step Method for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001).
- Robinson, Haddon W. *A Good Lesson from a Bad Example*, available from <http://preachingtoday.com/30327>; Internet (updated February 23, 2007; accessed February 23, 2007).
- _____. *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Sermons*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2001).
- _____. *Biblical Sermons*, Edited by Haddon W. Robinson (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989).
- _____. *The Disciple's Prayer*, available from <http://preachingtoday.com/30455>; Internet (updated February 23, 2007; accessed February 23, 2007).

Robinson, Haddon W. and Torrey W. Robinson. *It's All in How You Tell It: Preaching First-Person Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003).

Robinson, Haddon W. and Craig Brian Larson, Editors. *The Art & Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today's Communicators* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005).

Schaeffer, Francis A. *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: A Christian World View, Volume 1 Book Three: He Is There and He Is Not Silent* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1982).

Schaeffer, Francis A. *True Spirituality* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1972).

Smith, Donald K. *Creating Understanding, A Handbook for Christian Communication Across Cultural Landscapes* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982).

Stuart, Douglas. *Old Testament Exegesis*, Third Edition (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2001).

Stott, John R. W. *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982).

_____. *Culture and the Bible* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1981).

_____. *The Preacher's Portrait* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1961).

Whitney, Donald. *Spiritual Disciplines Within the Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1996).

Willhite, Keith. *Preaching With Relevance Without Dumbing Down* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2001).

Willhite, Keith and Scott M. Gibson, Editors. *The Big Idea of Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998).

Wright, N. T. *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997).

VITA

Kevin Flannery was born December 8, 1965 in Denver, Colorado. He was raised in Plano, Texas. He received his formal education at *Texas A&M University* (BA in Philosophy and Speech Communication, 1989), *Dallas Theological Seminary* (two years of course work toward a Th.M., 1990-1991), *Colorado Christian University* (MA in Counseling, 1992), *Phillips Theological Seminary* (M.Div., 1996), and *Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary* (D.Min., 2007). The coursework for the D.Min. was completed in South Hamilton, MA from 2002-2004.

Mr. Flannery was ordained in 1996 and has served, since August of 2000, as the Senior Pastor of the Congregational Church of Windsor Locks, CT (EFCA).

He married Cheryl Leigh Day in 1992 and has one daughter McKenzie Lynne.